

# Plenary Session: Fostering Synergies

Advancing Collaboration Between Academia and Professional Practice. Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> December 2023

## Keynote Speakers

Oya Atalay Franck (President – EAAE\_European Association for Architectural Education), Dubravko Bačić (ACE\_Architects Council of Europe), Ruth Schagemann (President – ACE\_Architects Council of Europe, online participation)

## Invited Contributors

Gregoris Patsalossavis, Michalis Cosmas, Alessandra Swiny, Chrystalla Psathiti, Pantoleon Skayannis, Panayiota Pyla

## Session Chairs

Nadia Charalambous, KAEBUP Coordinator  
Alkis Dikaïos, President Cyprus Architects Association  
Christos Christodoulou, Architects Council of Europe

This roundtable session brought together voices from both academia and professional architectural practice to explore how synergies between these domains can be meaningfully strengthened. The discussion was anchored by three central questions, each addressing a key aspect of collaboration and cross-pollination:

1. Sustainable Collaboration Frameworks: In what ways can academia and small-scale architectural practices – particularly those without formal Research and Development (R&D) departments – create sustainable platforms for ongoing communication and collaboration?
2. Curricular Integration of Practice: How can real-world professional insights be systematically integrated into higher education curricula? What channels or methods can support a consistent flow of practical knowledge into academic environments to enrich student learning?
3. Cross-Sectoral Synergies: What strategies can promote collaboration across fields such as architecture, urban planning, engineering, and urban studies? How can such cross-sectoral exchanges of curricula, expertise, and resources be organized to improve educational outcomes and prepare students for the complexity of professional challenges?

## Introduction and Welcome – Nadia Charalambous

The session opened with a warm welcome from Nadia Charalambous, who introduced herself as one of the moderators, alongside Alkis Dikaïos, President of the Cyprus Architects Association (CAA), and Christos Christodoulou, a practicing architect in Cyprus with long-standing involvement in both ETEK and the CAA.

Charalambous extended her gratitude to the distinguished guests participating in the roundtable. Among the international contributors were Oya Atalay Franck, President of the European Association for Architectural Education (EAAE); Dubravko Bačić, representing the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE); and Ruth Schagemann, President of ACE, who would be joining the discussion online. The session also welcomed several esteemed local participants from both academia and professional practice. These included Chrystalla Psathiti, a practitioner based in Paphos and academic at Neapolis University; Michalis Cosmas, primarily a practitioner but also engaged in a variety of initiatives; Gregoris Patsalossavis, a practicing architect in Nicosia; Alessandra Swiny, faculty member at the University of Nicosia; and Panayiota Pyla, Professor at the University of Cyprus.

In attendance were students from local institutions as well as participants from the KAEBUP conference. The roundtable marked the concluding event of the KAEBUP project – Knowledge Alliance for Evidence-Based Urban Practices – a three-year EU-funded initiative focused on bridging academia and practice. The project involved partners from four European countries – Croatia, Italy, Portugal, and Cyprus – and was hosted primarily by academic institutions, with the aim of fostering collaborative teaching and training methods involving students, researchers, and professionals alike.

Charalambous outlined the two core aims of the KAEBUP project. The first was to explore and co-develop pedagogical approaches through a combination of online and on-site workshops, intensive training sessions, and collaborative activities. The second aim involved the development of business model workshops, conducted in partnership with business departments, to identify essential transversal skills needed in architectural education. The project also included professional training sessions for faculty and internship opportunities for students in all four participating countries.

Framing the roundtable's relevance within this broader context, Charalambous introduced the session title, *Fostering Synergies*, as an invitation to further explore how collaborations between academia and professional practice could be deepened and sustained.

She then presented the three discussion topics that would guide the session:

1. Sustainable Frameworks for Collaboration – How can small-scale architectural practices, which often lack formal R&D departments, engage in meaningful and ongoing partnerships with academic institutions?
2. Integration of Practice into Curricula – What mechanisms can be introduced to ensure a continuous and productive flow of professional experience into higher education curricula?
3. Cross-Sector Collaboration – How can collaboration across disciplines such as architecture, planning, urban studies, and engineering be structured to enrich learning outcomes and prepare students for the complex realities of the professional world?

Charalambous concluded by inviting the keynote speakers, Oya Atalay Franck and Dubravko Bačić, to share their opening remarks, before opening the floor to contributions from the local participants and the broader audience.

## Positioning Statement – Oya Atalay Franck (EAAE)

Oya Atalay Franck began by expressing her gratitude for the invitation, noting the pleasure of participating in the event and her enthusiasm about being in Cyprus for the first time.

She introduced the European Association for Architectural Education (EAAE), an organization with nearly five decades of history and a membership of approximately 150 schools across Europe focused on architecture, planning, and design. The EAAE, she explained, is fundamentally committed to advancing the quality of both architectural education and research – two domains it views as inseparable. The association acts as a platform that connects institutions, individuals, and stakeholders, and it plays an advocacy role, albeit on a smaller scale compared to organizations like the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE). The EAAE's broad community includes schools of architecture, urbanism, landscape architecture, and design.

Drawing on data from the ACE Sector Study 2022, Atalay Franck noted that there are approximately 620,000 architects in Europe. The United Kingdom alone hosts 65 architecture schools, with numbers continuing to rise, while Germany displays similar trends. Italy and Germany count around 150,000 and 120,000 licensed architects respectively. Significantly, one-third of these professionals operate as sole principals, underscoring the critical role of mentorship and hands-on learning in the workplace. She emphasized that architectural education must reflect this diversity of practice – ranging from sole practitioners to partners in firms and salaried employees – rather than idealizing the image of the singular, iconic architect.

Turning to the current challenges facing architectural education and practice, Atalay Franck pointed to the complex, post-Bologna landscape of degree structuring, and the increasing importance of lifelong learning and continued professional development, particularly in light of emerging specializations in the construction and design sectors. She situated these issues within broader global vectors such as internationalization, mobility, and European funding alliances – developed in response to major global issues including war, pandemics, migration, inclusivity, democratic society, sustainability, and artificial intelligence. She stressed that these challenges are shared by both academia and professional practice.

Atalay Franck highlighted the built environment's responsibility for 40% of carbon emissions, and noted that as urban populations grow – projected to reach three-quarters of the global total – cities are becoming ever more central to sustainability debates. She called attention to the EAAE's partnerships with global and European networks, such as ACSA (Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture USA/Canada), and discussed recent events like the 2021 Biennial Educators Conference focused on “curricula for climate agency, design, and action”. The association has continued this work through initiatives such as the EAAE Annual Conference hosted by the Politecnico di Torino on architectural education, where cultural and contextual specificity – local as well as institutional – was emphasized as integral to any pedagogical reform.

Despite pressures of globalization, Atalay Franck argued, local culture and institutional identity remain vital in educational settings. She invited participants to the upcoming EAAE Deans Summit on Transformations in Amsterdam, to be held in April, and referenced a recent Erasmus+ funded study on the “afterlife” of architectural education – i.e., its impact across multiple sectors. This study reaffirmed the value of architectural education in producing generalists, who are exposed to a rich curriculum spanning natural sciences, applied sciences, humanities, and formal sciences. While some schools may emphasize one domain over another, this diversity of training offers students a broad base of potential and critical thought. However, she acknowledged the persistent tension in architectural education: students are often trained to do “everything”, which raises the question – *why?* – and

whether a more focused or specialized approach might be beneficial. This tension, she noted, remains unresolved.

The first joint conference between EAAE and ACE, held recently in Brussels, was another significant milestone. Organized in collaboration with ENACA (referring to the European Network of Architects' Competent Authorities network regarding the topics of professional admissions all around Europe), the event addressed themes of upskilling and educational practice. Here too, the emphasis was on forging stronger ties between education, research, and practice, which she identified as essential to tackling major societal issues – particularly climate change. She went on to emphasize how schools are proactively addressing this challenge by adopting resilient design curricula, experimenting with new materials, exploring waste-as-resource strategies, and promoting climate literacy. Nonetheless, there is a shared recognition of the urgency for new knowledge and skills, which continues to serve as a key driver of change.

Turning to the roundtable's three thematic questions, Atalay Franck shared three illustrative case studies:

1. Germany – Neuperlach, Munich «NEBourhoods» – A New European Bauhaus Lighthouse Project. This project, led by TU Munich, is situated in Neuperlach – a post-war urban settlement of 65,000 residents facing significant social and infrastructural challenges. The project involves 24 partners, including local citizens, government bodies, scientists, and artists, working in co-creative teams to renovate buildings and neighborhoods. The initiative stands out for its integration of entrepreneurship, empowering residents to launch new ventures during the physical transformation of their environment. Although not solely about collaborations between academia and small-scale firms, the project actively involves such firms in workshops and development processes, demonstrating how large-scale projects can foster engagement at smaller, localized levels.
2. Denmark – Circular Urban Transformation – «DESIRE» Designing the Irresistible Circular Society. Organized by Danish architecture schools, this second example also includes 24 partners and focuses on developing irresistible circular solutions for urban regeneration. Spread across eight locations in Denmark, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, and Slovenia, the project emphasizes social inclusion, symbiotic transformation, and reconnection with nature. Collaboration spans local governments, academic institutions, and other stakeholders, offering a replicable model for cross-sectoral engagement in urban development.
3. European Consortium – Art and AI Integration – «CrAFT – Creating Actionable Futures». The third project is led by ELIA (European League of Institutes of the Arts) and lead by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. With a focus on AI, smart cities, and citizen empowerment, the project links students, startups, and over 70 European cities – including participation from Cyprus. While the first two projects were primarily school-led, this initiative gives students a prominent, independent voice in shaping urban futures. The centrality of art and creative expression makes it a distinct case of cross-sector collaboration, where practice, academia, and civic participation are fully intertwined.

Reflecting on these examples, Atalay Franck noted the intensifying pressure on architectural education to respond to changing professional demands. In the UK, for example, the registration board has expanded its graduate competency framework from 11 to 39 skills, placing new burdens on schools to adapt curricula accordingly. While core architectural competencies remain constant – designing space and creating place – these are no longer sufficient in isolation. Architecture must now also deliver economic, ecological, social, cultural, and political value.

She concluded by emphasizing the need for a systemic approach to sustainability, requiring holistic thinking and cross-disciplinary collaboration. In a world marked by disruption and flux, the integration of research, teaching, and practice is not merely beneficial – it is essential. “Even if it’s about disruption, discontinuity, and radical change”, she said, “when we have co-creation, collaboration, and communication, we really reach our goals in a more efficient way”.

### Positioning Statement – Dubravko Bačić (ACE)

Following Oya Atalay Franck’s remarks, Alkis Dikaïos thanked her for her insightful contribution and congratulated the European Association for Architectural Education (EAAE) for its work in strengthening education and research. He then invited Dubravko Bačić to share his perspective on bridging the worlds of education and professional practice.

Bačić began by expressing his appreciation for the invitation to participate in the conference. He introduced the Architects’ Council of Europe (ACE), describing it as a European network composed of professional associations, chambers, and regulatory bodies from across the continent. As referenced by Atalay Franck, ACE collectively represents approximately 620,000 architects through its 37 member organizations. These include all 27 EU member states, three members with special status (Switzerland and the UK among them), and six observer members representing countries in the process of joining the EU.

Bačić outlined the three core purposes of ACE:

1. Collaboration – Facilitating knowledge exchange between member organizations and learning across national borders. ACE also engages in partnerships with global counterparts, including the EAAE and other transcontinental professional bodies.
2. Advocacy – Representing the interests of architectural professionals at the European level, particularly in relation to legislative and regulatory developments which are first shaped in the EU before being transposed into national law.
3. Promotion of the Profession – Supporting the visibility and societal relevance of architecture through strategic projects and outreach.

ACE’s work is structured into four thematic areas:

- Access to the Profession, which includes standards and requirements for registration.
- Practice of the Profession, addressing practical matters such as insurance, team dynamics, and architectural competitions.
- Quality of Architecture, with a focus on defining and assessing architectural excellence.
- EU Research Projects, a newer area that Bačić would return to in connection with the discussion topics.

Bačić emphasized the value of ACE’s biannual Sector Study, a Europe-wide survey that gathers consistent, long-term data on the profession through member organization networks. This data forms the backbone of ACE’s policy work and is widely used by practitioners and institutions alike.

Drawing on this data, Bačić addressed the first discussion topic: collaboration between academia and small-scale architectural firms. According to the Sector Study, there are roughly 150,000 architectural offices in Europe, the vast majority of which are very small. Specifically, 78% consist of one to two people, and 90-93% have five employees or fewer. As a

result, most of these offices do not have dedicated R&D departments and often struggle with time and resource constraints. Yet, Bačić argued, the capacity for research and innovation remains embedded in architectural education and in the exploratory nature of the design process itself. From Brunelleschi to contemporary practices like Foster + Partners or OMA/AMO, architecture has always been a field where design is closely tied to investigation and experimentation. Recent professional exhibitions, such as those presented at the Venice Biennale, reflect this increasingly research-oriented trend.

Bačić expressed concern that the profession may have lost some of its innovative momentum in recent decades. Historically, architects were often technological innovators – master builders who developed construction methods themselves. Today, architects are more likely to adapt and apply technologies developed elsewhere. Nonetheless, he insisted, the relationship between education, practice, and research has always existed, especially because project-based learning – the pedagogical foundation of most architecture schools – mirrors the iterative, exploratory nature of professional design work. Even without formal research departments, many offices conduct investigative work, particularly in heritage preservation and urban planning, both of which rely heavily on research-based methods in day-to-day practice. In this sense, Bačić offered a diagnostic perspective on the systemic gaps between education and practice, proposing several pathways to better integration:

1. **Lifelong Learning and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)** – Bačić emphasized the importance of CPD, noting that most CPD programs are developed and delivered by universities. This creates a valuable interface between research and practice, allowing small firms to access emerging knowledge. According to ACE data, European architects engage in an average of 20 hours of CPD per year.
2. **Practitioners in Academia** – He called for a better balance of practitioners in academic roles, highlighting the importance of having both educators and practicing architects on faculty. However, he acknowledged a major shift: architecture schools have become increasingly absorbed into university structures, where career advancement depends on peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, and formal research projects. This institutionalization has, in some cases, made it more difficult for academics to stay connected to professional practice. That said, variation across Europe remains significant – what applies in Ireland may not hold true in Bulgaria or Italy.
3. **Student Internships** – Bačić strongly advocated for internships as a critical point of connection between academia and professional practice. When coordinated effectively, internships benefit both students and firms, with students acting as carriers of new knowledge between the two spheres.
4. **Inclusive Conferences and Accessible Research** – He called for research-driven conferences to include more small offices and practitioners, ensuring wider dissemination and utility. He noted the proliferation of academic journals and publications, questioning their reach beyond academia. Making research freely available online is essential so that even small firms can access and apply it in practice.

Although ACE is not a research institution, Bačić noted its active role in EU-funded research projects, often in partnership with the EAAE. ACE frequently acts as a dissemination partner, ensuring that the outcomes of conferences, workshops, and publications reach member organizations and practitioners across Europe. This dissemination role is crucial not only at the European level but also at the national level, where schools can collaborate with professional associations to bridge research and practice more effectively.

Bačić reflected on the need for hybrid identities within the profession – those who both teach and practice, alternating between roles as necessary. While dedicated academic re-



search is a specialized pursuit, broader participation in practice-relevant inquiry remains essential.

Acknowledging the complexity of these issues, Bačić emphasized that there are no simple or immediate solutions, but that the pursuit of relevance in research must remain central. As someone who teaches, he observed a growing concern that many research topics have become overly esoteric, disconnected from practice. Still, he maintained that any well-articulated research topic has potential value, and while some may seem obscure at first, they may later find resonance and application in professional settings.

Finally, he referenced international exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale, which have increasingly incorporated research themes and outputs. For instance, Rem Koolhaas's *Fundamentals* exhibition explored foundational aspects of architecture in a research-intensive format. These events, he argued, play a significant role in making research accessible and inspirational to practitioners.

Bačić concluded his remarks by reaffirming his belief that research, education, and practice must remain connected, especially if the profession is to evolve and stay relevant in a rapidly changing world.

#### Positioning Statement – Ruth Schagemann (ACE)

Following Dubravko Bačić's contribution, Christos Christodoulou welcomed Ruth Schagemann, who joined the session online. Schagemann began by greeting her colleagues, Oya Atalay Franck and Dubravko Bačić, and expressing her pleasure at participating in the roundtable, even from a distance. She emphasized that the topic under discussion – the relationship between research and practice – is of crucial importance in the current moment.

She then highlighted two specific developments at the European level that reflect the relevance and complexity of this connection. First, Schagemann pointed to ongoing discussions surrounding the New European Bauhaus (NEB) and its integration into the Horizon Europe research framework. Horizon Europe is one of the EU's largest funding programs for research and innovation, and there had been significant debate over whether the New European Bauhaus should be recognized as a "sixth mission" within the program. This was not merely a bureaucratic matter, but one that underscored the need to advocate for architecture and urban planning as integral fields within the broader research landscape.

She noted that both the European Association for Architectural Education (EAAE) and the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE) worked closely together to maintain the visibility of the NEB within Horizon Europe. Although the effort to designate NEB as a sixth mission ultimately did not succeed, a compromise was reached: NEB will instead be implemented as a Mission-Enabled Deployment (MED) Facility. This format will allow for the targeted allocation of research funding specifically within architecture and urban planning.

Schagemann stressed that the debate behind this decision was challenging and highly significant. It was not easy to persuade stakeholders that the built environment – architecture and urban planning – should be recognized as a key driver of research and innovation in Europe. The next phase of the initiative will focus on supporting the European Commission in crafting research calls that tightly connect architectural and urban practice with research and development goals.

As her second point, Schagemann introduced the work of Marcos Ros, a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) from Spain, who has served as rapporteur for the New European Bauhaus and has shown strong commitment to advancing this agenda. She explained that, within the European Parliament, each of the 705 MEPs is entitled to propose projects. Annually, more than 1,400 proposals are submitted, and only 30 to 40 are selected for im-

plementation. Ros was successful in having his proposal selected. His project centers on the idea of simulating the New European Bauhaus as a grassroots initiative, and consists of two core components:

1. Creation of a Hub – A digital or physical platform where researchers, architects, urban planners, and universities can collaborate, share ideas, disseminate research findings, and exchange practical experiences.
2. Development of Vouchers for Small Cities – A funding mechanism that enables small-sized cities to apply for vouchers valued between € 30,000 and € 40,000. While modest in scale, these vouchers are designed to support existing local initiatives, facilitating real-world application of NEB principles through architecture, design, and community-based planning.

Schagemann underscored the symbolic and strategic significance of this effort. It demonstrates that the transformation of the built environment – toward more sustainable, inclusive, and high-quality living spaces – requires not only design excellence, but deep integration of research and innovation.

She concluded by highlighting the importance of aligning national-level programs with European initiatives and architectural values. Creating effective alliances between Member States and EU institutions, she argued, is essential if architectural quality and innovation are to be supported across all levels of governance.

Following the keynote presentations, moderator Alkis Dikaïos opened the floor to the roundtable's invited educators and practitioners, inviting them to share their perspectives on the connections between education, research, and practice, and how these align with the principles of the New European Bauhaus. He invited Alessandra Swiny and Panayiota Pyla to speak first, representing academic institutions, and noted that Chrystala Psathiti, with one foot in both education and practice, would follow.

#### Positioning Statement – Alessandra Swiny (University of Nicosia)

Alessandra Swiny began by thanking the moderators. She noted that the University of Nicosia, and private universities in general, have a slightly different role than public institutions, particularly in terms of funding and availability of research.

She emphasized the importance of discussing the relationship with small-scale firms, noting the need for proper infrastructure to enable this dialogue. In her view, this kind of infrastructure is currently missing. She suggested that something enabling better communication of availabilities and needs would be helpful.

As the conversation turned toward the industry, she observed a real lack of connection. Although efforts had been made over the years to encourage this connection, she noted that there were ebbs and flows, often related to economic pressures. In the past, there had been much more collaboration. Swiny pointed out the need for more funding to support classes that would allow practitioners to participate more easily. Without such support, practitioners end up sacrificing their working time to participate. She explained that they are not paid to attend critiques, which can last up to six hours, effectively costing them a whole day.

She reiterated that some form of infrastructure would be very useful, especially in enabling student communication within a mentorship framework. Such a system would allow students to connect with certain architects and offices during their education, potentially



leading to better relationships as they enter practice. She noted that nothing like this currently exists in Cyprus. She asked whether mentorship programs exist internationally, particularly in Europe, and suggested that such a model would be very useful.

#### Positioning Statement – Panayiota Pyla (University of Cyprus)

Responding to the invitation from Alkis Dikaïos to share her insights, Panayiota Pyla began by reflecting on the long-standing nature of the dialogue between academia and practice, noting that various forms of exchange have existed for some time. However, she argued that in order to move this dialogue forward, it is necessary to understand its mechanics and the challenges involved.

As she listened to the previous speakers, Pyla was prompted to focus on two key points. The first was the issue of research and development. While, as mentioned earlier in the session, it is common to say that every small office engages in research, Pyla stressed that this form of research operates with very different mechanics compared to academic research. In design practice, she noted, every line on a drawing may represent a research question, making the process arguably even more intense. However, this form of inquiry is different from the academic model, where a topic is systematically explored and formally published.

To bridge these differences, Pyla suggested the need for analysis and recognition of how the same terms – like “research” – are executed differently in professional practice. Understanding these differences, she argued, is key to identifying new modes of dissemination and making the work done in small offices more visible and communicable within broader research frameworks.

The second point she raised was the issue of economics. While market pressures also exist in academia, they are often more bracketed compared to professional practice, where economic concerns are dominant and unavoidable. She argued that it is crucial to acknowledge and identify these economic tensions and mismatches if new forms of collaboration are to be developed.

As a concrete example, Pyla pointed to recent regulatory changes in Cyprus’s housing policy, including new laws that tax larger houses. She described these changes as revolutionary, and noted that they align with discussions that have long been taking place within academia. To her, this represented a clear opportunity to establish a more substantial and meaningful communication between academic knowledge and professional practice.

#### Response – Dubravko Bačić (ACE)

Dubravko Bačić responded by clarifying that his earlier remarks were not intended to tie research strictly to institutional or political structures. Rather, his aim was to explore how small practices might benefit from research, and to identify similarities between research and the problem-solving or design thinking inherent in every architectural project. He acknowledged that while statistical models describe the structure of offices one way, reality is often more nuanced. In his view, research needs to reach small offices, because practitioners typically have limited time to seek it out themselves. The challenge lies in ensuring that research findings, questions, books, and publications are made accessible and readily available to smaller practices in forms they can use effectively.

#### Response – Oya Atalay Franck (EAAE)

Oya Atalay Franck followed with a further reflection on the position of small offices. She cautioned against speaking about small firms as if they were passive recipients of knowledge.

These practices, she emphasized, are not disconnected from research – they are formed by individuals like us, or our students, and they know how to conduct research. The issue is not a lack of capacity but a need to maintain and reinforce connections with the knowledge and skills they developed during their education.

She argued that the mindset and culture of research instilled in students during their academic years can and should carry over into their professional lives. If these values are nurtured properly, they become embedded in the DNA of young architects, enabling them to remain active participants in collaborative and research-based projects throughout their careers. Atalay Franck concluded by noting that it is essential to ensure small offices stay connected to calls for projects and opportunities. She stressed that this connection must be mutual – it cannot be a one-way effort. Institutions and practitioners must work together to sustain the flow of communication and collaboration.

#### Positioning Statement – Chrystala Psathiti (Neapolis University Pafos / Practitioner)

Following the discussion on how to sustain connections between practice and education, Chrystala Psathiti shared her perspective as both an academic and the head of a small-scale architectural practice. She began by emphasizing the importance of clearly defining the skills students are expected to acquire. While a broad European framework exists – comprising eleven key competency areas – it may be too general to be effectively applied. Psathiti noted that there is a lack of clarity regarding how these skills are addressed in different academic institutions, and how they translate into professional settings.

In order to bridge this gap, she argued that more investment and funding are needed to support training initiatives specifically for small-scale architectural offices. Drawing from her own experience, she explained that while she is able to conduct research through her academic role, practice presents different challenges. Time is limited, and practitioners must regularly deal with legislative hurdles, client demands, and budget constraints, all of which make it difficult to pursue research to its full potential.

She suggested that financial support for training programs could offer small practices the flexibility and incentive to engage more actively with research. With dedicated funding, these firms would have the time and resources to invest in training, which in turn could support and improve their work. Psathiti gave the example of current legislation in Cyprus requiring solar studies, which has created a more research-based framework for energy and solar performance evaluations. However, she noted that no similar requirements exist for other aspects of design, such as social or material considerations. This imbalance, she suggested, reflects a missed opportunity for broader research integration in practice, and highlights the potential for legislation to play a more constructive role in promoting research.

She also noted that while many small practices do engage in research-like activities, these efforts are typically unsystematic and often go undocumented. Firms tend to acquire knowledge through day-to-day challenges but do not store or organize this information in a way that can be reused or built upon, as would be done in a formal research context.

Finally, she stressed the need to teach students about knowledge management, particularly how to decode legislation and understand it as a form of research. She described this as a core activity within small-scale practices – one that is already happening but is often overlooked as a learning opportunity. Without systems for recording and reflecting on these experiences, such knowledge is gained passively, rather than actively through structured research processes.

### Positioning Statement – Michalis Cosmas (Architect)

Following Chrystala Psathiti's contribution, Christos Christodoulou invited Michalis Cosmas to share his thoughts. Cosmas began by reflecting on the nature of the conversation, noting that the ongoing discussion about the disconnect between education, research, and practice was particularly fascinating. He pointed out that architectural practice, in its current form, is relatively new, especially when compared to its apprenticeship-based origins.

In his view, the platforms for dialogue between research and practice already exist, and it is important to continue investing in and utilizing these platforms – through discussion events such as the roundtable itself – to strengthen communication and collaboration.

He emphasized that architecture is a pluralistic profession, where each practitioner carries their own set of individual polemics. As such, he expressed skepticism about attempts to codify the profession through universal points, directives, or legislation. Instead, he argued that meaningful collaboration can only occur among individuals who share common interests.

In the Cypriot context, he identified the challenge as one of matching the interests of research groups with those of practitioners. Rather than identifying as a “practitioner”, Cosmas described himself and others in the profession as producers of space, each operating through a personal filter of priorities, skills, and knowledge. Successful collaboration, he suggested, depends on aligning these differing interests, which could then lead to productive outcomes.

### *Response – Dubravko Bačić (ACE)*

In response, Dubravko Bačić posed a question to Cosmas, asking whether, in a small professional and academic environment like Cyprus, where everyone tends to know each other, there is any evidence of shared interests emerging across the sectors.

### *Reply – Michalis Cosmas*

Cosmas responded by noting that such alignment of interests is not a primary focus in Cyprus. He explained that Cyprus's academic architectural environment is relatively young. Although architecture schools have existed for over a decade, university-hosted architectural discussions are a much more recent development. He pointed out that most local practitioners have studied abroad, resulting in a community that speaks different architectural languages. In his two decades of experience in Cyprus, there have been only a handful of moments where a shared architectural conversation truly emerged.

Cosmas noted that architectural professionals in Cyprus tend to discuss a wide range of topics, and if something interesting arises, it may be extrapolated into further dialogue or exploration. Otherwise, individuals continue along their own paths. Whether or not something collaborative emerges depends on whether shared interests with researchers exist. If they do, he noted, there is potential for something valuable to come out of the interaction. If not, practitioners will continue learning and growing through their own work. He concluded by expressing appreciation for Bačić's earlier remark about research having the capacity to feed itself.

### *Response – Oya Atalay Franck (EAAE)*

Oya Atalay Franck contributed a perspective from Switzerland, noting that in that context, the professional title of “architect” is not protected, meaning that anyone can claim the title and open a practice. She explained that in Swiss schools, most design studios are taught by

part-time practitioners, with very few full-time academic staff. This creates an intense overlap between practice and education, where conversations similar to those discussed by Cosmas occur naturally and frequently – sometimes as often as two days a week. Atalay Franck highlighted the value of this mixed culture within schools, as it allows participants to identify what is relevant or shared, and to recognize that it is also acceptable to have topics that are not mutually followed. However, she also acknowledged that there are moments when it is unfortunate that things do not come together. In her view, architecture schools have a responsibility to foster and support such conversations and collaborations.

#### Positioning Statement – Gregoris Patsalosavvis (Architect, Nicosia)

When invited by Alkis Dikaio to contribute, Gregoris Patsalosavvis reflected on the conversation with a note of concern and urgency. He remarked that while the presentations from the European guests had been interesting and informative, many of the initiatives and developments discussed do not reach local practitioners in Cyprus.

“There are a lot of things going on at the European level”, he said, “which we don’t know about. They don’t reach us. We don’t know about the research”. He emphasized the need to create mechanisms to ensure that local professionals are exposed to what is happening in Europe. “I think we are neglected. Somebody has to wake us up – we are sleeping”.

Patsalosavvis agreed with earlier speakers on the importance of education and the development of skills for students, noting, “Education is very important, I agree with what you all said on all these topics”. He reflected personally on his early experiences in architectural education: “I remember reading for the first time, and learning to draw. I was a bit scared because I had to wear appropriate trousers and fix my shoes and all these things”. Though the profession has changed, he believes architectural education today lacks broad knowledge. “The topics are very interesting”, he said, “but the schools and the programmes lack broad knowledge”.

#### Response – Ruth Schagemann (ACE)

Ruth Schagemann responded by underscoring the need for practitioners to be more integrated into the development of funding calls and research programs, particularly those oriented toward real-world projects. She stressed the importance of practice-based research – research that emerges from and supports the existing built environment.

This, she argued, would allow research ideas to translate into actual projects or components of real projects, closing the gap between theory and application.

#### Comment – Audience Member

A participant from the audience added to the discussion by emphasizing that the relationship between the market and academia should begin early in a student’s education, ideally during undergraduate (bachelor’s) studies. Students should engage with practice from the start, working alongside practitioners to see how the field functions in real-world contexts. The speaker noted that architectural education is more than a career choice: “They do not merely study this. They choose a way of life... it’s something you live”. The speaker also proposed that small firms be required, through competition regulations, to include at least two students in international design competitions. This, they suggested, would allow students to become actively involved in professional environments and experience competitions – which inherently involve research-oriented processes – as a platform for connecting education and practice.

*Response – Christos Christodoulou (Moderator)*

Christodoulou responded to the idea, suggesting that such involvement could be formalized within the academic year and even regulated. He acknowledged that while architectural academia often aspires toward idealistic goals, in practice, real-world constraints must be taken into account. Referencing Oya Atalay Franck's earlier observation that most design studios in Switzerland are taught by practitioners, he asked how many similar cases exist in Cyprus. "We should consider this also", he said. "In Cyprus, how many studios do we have where only practitioners teach?". For Christodoulou, the issue went beyond relationships: "It's much wider than that; it's a question of culture".

*Response – Alessandra Swiny (University of Nicosia)*

Alessandra Swiny then pointed out a key mechanism that had not yet been addressed in the discussion: curriculum design, particularly in the context of the second and third discussion topics. She praised the Erasmus and Erasmus+ programmes, crediting them with transforming interdisciplinary communication and collaboration across Europe. "It's just completely exploded the relationships in Europe", she said, contrasting this with the situation in the United States, where the same level of institutional connectivity does not exist if one is not working within academia. Swiny suggested that a similar framework could be developed for professional practices, not just universities. This could create a European network for practices, enabling collaboration beyond academia and into the professional realm.

*Response – Oya Atalay Franck (EAAE)*

Oya Atalay Franck returned to the discussion to address the real pressures faced by small offices, typically composed of one to five people. She acknowledged that every hour spent on research is an hour not paid. Small firms face constant pressure from clients, deadlines, and daily operational issues, which push research priorities aside.

She questioned why no funding mechanisms currently exist to support these efforts: "Who has to pay for it? Do we need to free public money for it?". She also raised the issue of institutional responsibility, asking why chambers or schools are not in a position to provide such funding – whether to pay for extra hours or to compensate practitioners for their time.

Atalay Franck noted that while the lack of support is a longstanding issue, many project outputs and research reports are available as open access resources. "It's in your hand", she said. "You have all the reports and it's an invitation to make use of the results in your own practice".

She concluded by highlighting the broader systemic problem of limited investment in research outside of large industries. "It's a question of shifting this kind of knowledge into your daily life", she said. "How could we get [small firms] into the fold, to stitch everything together?".

**Audience Discussion: Key Themes and Reflections**

During the open floor session, participants raised a number of important reflections that expanded the discussion beyond the invited speakers. A central concern that emerged was the structural limitations of architectural education. One audience member emphasized that architectural programs are expected to deliver an overwhelming volume of content, spanning both practical and theoretical domains. The result, they argued, is a curriculum over-

loaded with expectations, leaving little time to focus on essential research skills. Students are often sent into practice without proficiency in technical drawing, software, or construction knowledge, while simultaneously lacking training in research methods and critical inquiry. This, the speaker suggested, stems from a mistaken belief that five years of architectural education should produce fully formed professionals. They proposed that universities should instead focus on cultivating curiosity and the ability to ask foundational questions – skills more in line with academic training – while professional development should continue through structured training after graduation, as is the case in other disciplines.

Another recurring theme was the potential of architectural competitions as a bridging mechanism between academia and practice. One contributor proposed that students, educators, and practitioners could collaborate through competitions, which naturally combine research, design, and real-world constraints. They suggested that requirements be introduced – particularly for international competitions – that compel small offices to include students on their teams. This would expose students to live projects and enhance their understanding of the profession, while also making competitions more inclusive and pedagogically valuable.

The role of practitioners in academia was also highlighted as an essential pathway for knowledge transfer. One audience member pointed out that teaching in universities provides practitioners with a means of staying up to date in a rapidly evolving field. If small offices feel disconnected from current research, they argued, participating in academic studios allows them to remain engaged and bring valuable insight back into their own practices. This point was reinforced by another speaker, who noted that architecture is an industry characterized by fast-paced innovation – especially in sustainability and zero-emission technologies. Without parallel involvement in practice, academic teaching risks becoming detached from the real challenges facing the built environment. In some countries, such as Italy, regulations prevent academics from practicing, which was seen as a serious limitation. In contrast, in Norway, where this dual role is encouraged, professors are expected to remain professionally active precisely because of these rapid developments.

Several participants stressed the importance of building structured relationships between academia and practice. Consultancy was raised as one possible form of collaboration. Given the limited time and resources available to small offices, it was suggested that they could benefit from engaging with existing academic research, rather than initiating their own. Universities, in this view, could serve as sources of applied knowledge, offering insights and expertise to support practice. Communication challenges were another major concern. Nadia Charalambous acknowledged the difficulty of conveying research findings beyond academic settings. Research is often complex, and simplifying it in ways that make it useful or impactful for practitioners and policymakers is not easy. Nevertheless, she stressed the importance of investing in this process – what she described as building a “chain of knowledge” – linking stakeholders and improving awareness across sectors.

The discussion also turned to the structure of professional training following graduation. Gregoris Patsalosavvis raised the issue of post-educational development, noting that the current model in Cyprus – where a graduate works for a year before being signed off by an employer – is insufficient. Drawing on his own experience completing the RIBA Part 3 in the UK, he argued for a more formalized and structured training system overseen by a professional body such as ETEK, and developed in partnership with universities. Christos Christodoulou added that what matters is not the duration of post-graduate practice, but whether it is structured. A 12-month structured experience, he said, could be more valuable than three years without clear objectives or evaluation criteria.

This led to a broader debate about the purpose of architectural education. Christodoulou questioned whether universities are meant to produce professionals ready to enter practice immediately, or “architectural thinkers” equipped to grow and adapt over time. He argued



that some skills can be learned after graduation, and cautioned against reducing education to technical training. This point was echoed by another participant, who argued that the profession often expects academia to deliver graduates fully prepared for office work, which is both unrealistic and counterproductive. Instead, practice must take on part of the responsibility for continued training.

Finally, the conversation returned to the potential of universities to act as initiators of research in collaboration with small-scale practices. One guest praised the openness and curiosity of the students at the host university, noting how important it is for both students and faculty to gain real-world experience. Alkis Dikaïos suggested that universities could play a more active role by offering funding to small practices to carry out specific research projects. If funding were made available, he argued, small firms would welcome the opportunity, as it would allow them to expand their teams, engage with research, and ultimately improve the quality of their work. In this way, universities could become catalysts for applied research and innovation, aligning with the principles of initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus.

## Concluding Reflections

As the roundtable drew to a close, Nadia Charalambous invited final reflections from the three keynote speakers – Oya Atalay Franck, Dubravko Bačić, and Ruth Schagemann – to offer their thoughts on the rich and wide-ranging discussion.

Oya Atalay Franck began by expressing her wish that such a conversation could take place in the Chamber of Architects, with practitioners, students, and colleagues sitting side by side. She emphasized the need to go beyond internal academic discourse and ensure that such dialogues are shared more broadly. She acknowledged the diversity of cultures within schools and professional practices across Europe. Even though European directives outline common skill sets and curricular frameworks, the ways in which these are taught and interpreted vary significantly between institutions. A school, she noted, provides not only mind-set, method, and craft, but also a sensibility toward the quality of the built environment. Rather than aiming to define a fixed set of skills that make a good architect, she argued that education should focus on giving students an inner compass – a sense of curiosity, criticality, and self-confidence to ask not just *what is right or wrong*, but *how can it be done better*.

Atalay Franck stressed the importance of collaboration and negotiation, acknowledging that architecture has become too complex to navigate alone. She shared that her institution is considering curriculum reform to support part-time teaching and learning, allowing students to work while studying – an economic necessity for many. While this was once resisted in favor of full-time academic immersion, changing conditions demand more flexible models of education. She concluded by reaffirming the importance of maintaining quality while exploring new systems, and expressed appreciation for the discussion: “This was very exciting for me – I learned a lot”.

Dubravko Bačić echoed the view that not everything can be learned in school, and pointed out that different schools have different cultures, traditions, and contexts, which must be respected. Education, he argued, must strike a balance between foundational knowledge and the capacity to adapt and grow, a balance that is necessarily dynamic and always in flux – hence why education is always under reform. He shared a personal anecdote from a recent visit to Christos Christodoulou’s office, where he saw three young architects working on a competition. On their desk was a book by Charles Baudelaire, something he found surprising and moving. He reflected on how architectural culture, once built around bookstores and reading, is evolving in a time when such habits are in decline. Yet moments like this

affirm the continued intellectual engagement of younger generations, even amid broader societal changes.

Ruth Schagemann offered three succinct reflections. First, she emphasized that research and practice must work together, particularly given the urgent challenges facing the built environment. This collaboration must be interdisciplinary, involving connections across architecture, urban planning, and beyond. Architecture, she stressed, is not just a professional field but a relevant topic for research and innovation, and it should be recognized as such in funding and policy priorities. Second, she called for a sharper focus on identifying the key problems we face today – social, environmental, spatial – and working collectively to develop targeted solutions. Third, she underscored her strong belief in collaborative innovation between universities and practices. Only through this alliance, she argued, can we begin to develop meaningful responses to pressing issues such as urban inequality, sustainability, and the transformation of our living environments. “I think we are finding solutions”, she concluded, “and we need to continue doing so – together”.

In closing, Nadia Charalambous thanked the speakers and participants, and reaffirmed the intention to disseminate the outcomes of the discussion. “I hope that it doesn’t stay in the room”, she said, acknowledging the value of the exchange. She offered thanks to Christos Christodoulou and Alkis Dikaïos for moderating the session, and to all who contributed to the conversation.