

External Examiner's Report
Oliver Domeisen

I am grateful for having been invited as an external examiner to the diploma/master presentations last week at Innsbruck University and would like to offer my gratitude for the warm welcome and generous hospitality I received.

The organisation of the two-day examination was exemplary, as was the stimulating and open discussion with the faculty and staff on all occasions.

I was impressed with the high level of some of the work presented as well as the rich diversity in approaches towards architecture. It is precisely the variety of topics and working methods that offers the students a rounded education as they move through their academic life. Unlike other schools, which foster more 'homogenous' studios, Innsbruck University proves that an inclusive approach allows a school that is not set in a metropolitan area to compete (and succeed) on an international level without betraying its local relevance.

The quality and elaboration of some schemes would have been successful propositions in any other globally renowned school, such as the Architectural Association or the Bartlett, which allow the student to develop a project over the course of an entire year. I would especially like to highlight the work of Andrea Dal Negro (Advisor: Colletti) and Christian Hammerl (Advisor: Prenner), which both deserve recognition as outstanding achievements. I support the idea that the school should introduce a recurring prize (or prizes) to reward such exceptional work, and make an effort to communicate such achievements to a wider audience through publication.

The grades awarded during the examination by myself and faculty members represent a more or less evenly distributed range (4 x Grade 1, 3 x Grade 2, 2 x Grade 3, 2 x Grade 4). For the future assessment strategy of the school I would recommend to slightly curb the awarding of the highest grade, and to assess the implications for the school of allowing fails (Grade 5). A fail-grade should not be awarded without previous warnings and checks, which could be put in place. If a student decides to present against the previous advice of the faculty, then a fail-grade would be a calculable risk and must be accepted by the student. The upholding of school standards, which thus becomes apparent, can benefit the institution by way of managing and augmenting student expectations. Like in every other school there will always be weak students, a fact that cannot necessarily be blamed on faculty members. A rigorous assessment structure throughout a student's career, and the adequate support of departments that tend to attract weak students, seem the most productive way of dealing with this unavoidable circumstance.

In order to further improve the quality of masters/diplomas at Innsbruck University I would offer the following advice:

- Critical thought: Hardly any of the students were able to explain their work within a larger critical context. Architectural history and theory did not play a strong

enough role in both the conceptual and practical development of projects. Because of this the majority of students were not able to articulate an idiosyncratic critical position towards the established canon, either through their design work or the verbal presentation. Neither the knowledge nor the application of the discipline's inherent theoretical and historical foundations became sufficiently apparent during the presentations or the subsequent question- and answer- sessions. Instead one was confronted with the wholesale adoption of (sometimes problematic) current trends. This was especially a problem for projects, which in an entirely uncritical manner embraced competition briefs as the basis for the design project. It should be the mission of every architecture school to educate a new generation of architects that is able to question the framework of the profession (past and present) in order to advance it. 'Competence' in architecture must surely exceed a certain technical virtuosity, and include critical awareness and speculation, if the profession is to survive within a competitive field increasingly dominated by developers and technicians.

- Drawing: Not enough students used drawing as a generative tool in their design process and instead relied on familiar modes of representation (plan, section, rendered view). I would have wished for more idiosyncratic approaches towards representation, especially when it comes to drawing (this was only apparent in the work of CH. Hammerl). The students seemed to be hesitant in questioning, layering or re-configuring their tools of production in order to visualize their ideas most convincingly. Considering that the visualization of an individual architectural idea is still a primary architectural task within an economy of competitions and publication, the school may consider to encourage more actively a student's engagement with architectural image production, both from a technical as well as a historical perspective.
- Preparatory documentation: On several occasions I would have liked to see a summary sheet of a student listing their path through architectural education (studios, courses taken; grades). As an external examiner I could only speculate on the body of knowledge and technical expertise that each student should have synthesised within their diploma project. In the interest of managing the examiner's expectations, and to guarantee a fair assessment of the student, I would welcome such information to be provided prior to or at the examination.

The above points are merely aiming to stimulate a discussion about how to improve the standard of work even further. As I have mentioned before: the school has produced excellent and inspiring work that it should be proud of.

Kind regards,

Oliver Domeisen

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