

Pascale Vonier, Editor

Editorial Offices

1735 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20006, USA
Tel: 202/785 2324; fax: 202/628 0448
Website: www.acsa-arch.org

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ACSA Mission Statement

To advance architectural education through support of member schools, their faculty, and students. This support involves:

- Serving by encouraging dialogue among the diverse areas of discipline;
- Facilitating teaching, research, scholarly and creative works, through intra/interdisciplinary activity;
- Articulating the critical issues forming the context of architectural education
- Fostering public awareness of architectural education and issues of importance

This advancement shall be implemented through five primary means: advocacy, annual program activities, liaison with collateral organizations, dissemination of information and response to the needs of member schools in order to enhance the quality of life in a global society.

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WHAT IS THE NATURE OF ARCHITECTURAL KNOWLEDGE?

BY KIM TANZER



Over the years, I have had many conversations with university colleagues who teach in the sciences which follow this general outline: I ask about a colleague's research and he or she begins by saying, "We know [insert a description about agreed upon knowledge within the discipline] and I am looking at [insert a question directed toward a filling a gap in a known field of knowledge or a hypothesized extension or redirection of this agreed upon knowledge]."

The frequency of this pattern of conversation has led me to wonder, what do most architects agree that we know? And, what further research needs to be done to fill in, extend, or redirect our collective understanding of architectural knowledge?

As I have started asking this question of academic architects, I have come to believe that we apparently do not conceptualize a shared ground of common knowledge, but rather shared, or even conflicting, zones of action. While I love the fluidity of design propositions, our lack of agreed-upon common knowledge concerns me for several reasons.

First, if we do not base our designs on a largely shared and verified knowledge base, we find ourselves asking the public

to have faith in our assertions that designs will indeed perform as we contend. In fact if we ourselves do not believe our designs are largely based on verifiable knowledge, we can only be operating on faith. And if such projects fail, they lead to a generalized decrease in the value of professional architectural service.

Second, if we do not teach our students the outlines of our knowledge base, one must wonder what we are teaching them beyond design thinking. While architectural educators teach design thinking very well, academics in other fields argue that they do too. (Since we tend not to test assertions we can't even prove our own point!) Architectural curricula are regarded as among the most demanding in many universities. Is such rigor necessary if a curriculum does not transmit a comprehensive knowledge base through all of its courses?

Third, having participated actively in scholarly exchanges for two decades, I regret that persuasively advanced arguments, gathered evidence, or unlocked architectural problems seem not to accumulate as a knowledge base. That is, we do not build adequately on the work of our colleagues. Rather, studies (in written, drawn, or built form) fall by the wayside, as new fascinations emerge. Too often, we find ourselves repeating, not extending, propositions made a generation earlier.

For decades the ACSA has offered numerous vehicles for the development of our shared knowledge base, including Fall Conferences, the Annual Conference, and the *Journal of Architectural Education*. We are aware that these vehicles are sometimes perceived as inflected toward certain types of scholarship, perhaps unintentionally exacerbating the fragmentation of our knowledge base. We are working to address the goal of greater inclusivity and connectivity in several ways.