

café

Toward an Architecture Policy for Canada

CANADIAN ARCHITECTURE FORUMS ON EDUCATION FORUMS CANADIENS D'ARCHITECTURE SUR L'ÉDUCATION NEWS

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“ You put together two things that have not been put together before. And the world is changed. ”

- Julian Barnes /
Prof. Catherine Hamel

CAFÉ Atlantic: Launching a National Conversation on the Built Environment in Canada

What is the future of architecture?

On October 7th – world architecture day – over 100 architecture students, educators and professionals gathered in the magical Medjuck Building at Dalhousie University to attempt a response to this difficult question. The occasion was the first in a series of Canadian Architecture Forums on Education, also known as CAFÉs, intended to foster a trans-national conversation on the role of architectural education and research in shaping Canada's future. The aim is to take the pulse of questions and desires currently on the minds of the next generation of design professionals in order to shape the agenda and priorities of a forward-looking architecture policy for Canada.

In addition to regional students, educators and professionals, this first CAFÉ – CAFÉ Atlantic – hosted 10 representatives from four other Canadian schools of architecture, including the University of Calgary, Université Laval, the University of Manitoba, and the University of Toronto.

Aspirations, Concerns and Contexts

The afternoon began with a series of short pecha-kucha-style presentations framing current aspirations, concerns and contexts.

Student co-presidents of the Dalhousie Architecture Students Association (DASA), **Kaley Doleman** and **Stavros Kondeas**, began the session with a welcome and celebration of student diversity and achievements. **Diogo Burnay**, Director of the School

of Architecture at Dalhousie University, emphasized the school's approach to design as simultaneously experimental and grounded in daily life and physicality. Quoting favorite maxims, he emphasized: "The only rule is work." **Lisa Landrum**, CAFÉ Project Lead and Associate Dean Research at the University of Manitoba, provided an overview of the CAFÉ project and its contribution to a broader national initiative to mobilize an architecture policy for Canada through broad public consultation. Nova Scotia architect and RAIC Atlantic Regional Director, **Gregory MacNeil**, summarized RAIC programs aimed at advancing architectural excellence and enhancing public and political appreciation of architecture's value and impact. Prof. **François Dufaux** and graduate-diploma student **Maxime Nadon-Roger** from Université Laval discussed Québec's progress toward a provincial architectural strategy and the unique role the school of architecture plays in reconciling forward-looking ambitions with respect for tradition. Professor **Ted Cavanagh** of Dalhousie University spoke to the importance of elevating research (not just practice) in any conversation about the future of architecture, and to integrating multi-disciplinary research into an architecture policy process, including studies in the social sciences. **Yasmin Al-Samarrai**, the 2018-2019 President of GALDSU, the Graduate Architecture Landscape and Design Student Union at the University of Toronto, commended the multidisciplinary richness of the U. of T. Daniels community and presented some exciting student initiatives in advancing work-life balance, including yoga for architects, film nights, TGIF parties, and a rigorous health and well-being report. **Matthew Gillingham**, a current Master of Architecture thesis student at Dalhousie University, shared a philosophy of architectural education as

"learning how to learn," which includes learning to appreciate architecture as a verb; to embrace collaboration as key to creativity; and to discover links between personal interests (like grilled cheese sandwiches and drumming) and the synaesthetic pleasures of making and experiencing architecture. **Jessica Piper**, thesis student and president of the University of Manitoba Association of Architecture Students (UMAAS), presented the architectural situation in Winnipeg as a complex nexus of creativity and struggle: a laboratory for hands-on making and successful emerging practitioners, yet also a place continuing to grapple with issues of urban sprawl and social injustice. **Peter Braithwaite**, a Halifax-based architect, shared his trajectory from carpenter to Dalhousie architecture graduate, to design apprentice, to principal of Peter Braithwaite Studio Ltd., with its strong commitment to collaborative processes, design-build and craftsmanship. **Catherine Hamel**, Associate Professor at the University of Calgary, presented a series of probing questions and poetic observations, drawing inspiration from the ancient deity of doorways (Janus), who looks both forward and backward – simultaneously to the future and the past; and the words of Julian Barnes, who reminds us: "You put together two things that have not been put together before. And the world is changed."





Brian MacKay-Lyons, of MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple Architects, brought the presentations to a close with inspiring built examples and reminders of architecture's social agency. Echoing the poet William Carlos Williams, he asserted "ideas only in things."

Dialogue and Debate

Following the presentations, the assembly divided into smaller groups to begin the interactive core of the CAFÉ: round-table consultations on a set of themes and questions concerning architecture's relation to Place, People, Prosperity and Potential.

Concurrently – across the Bay of Fundy in Moncton – dozens of architects and interns assembled in a meeting of the Architects' Association of New Brunswick (AANB) to discuss these same four themes. Reporting on the consultations began with a virtual exchange between Dalhousie students in Halifax and AANB professionals in Moncton, sharing insights on their respective conversations. AANB past-president **Don Sterritt** reminded everyone that an architect's design attention must extend far beyond the footprint of any building, to enrich the public realm, streetscapes and life of a community. He also emphasized the importance of architects lending their skillsets to the broader social good by participating in activities like Planning Advisory Boards and Community Groups, which precede design work but often establish design agendas and collective aspirations.

Meanwhile, around the tables in Halifax, students articulated a range of issues: the pressing need for present and future architects to tackle the climate crisis and to embrace sustainable design as integral to design excellence; the importance of trans-disciplinary collaboration, such as the crucial

“ ... sharing and community give us an opportunity to develop new forms of policy making. ”
- Sarah Yoes
Dalhousie graduate student

role of humanities in design education to help foster ethical practitioners; and concerns that new developments disregard the history of a place and lack strategies for listening to people, especially Indigenous Peoples. At the same time, students were optimistic that architectural leadership – coupled with public and political support – could renew relations with communities, restore connectivity and local economies, and harness architecture as a powerful tool of reconciliation.

In the closing comments, University of Calgary graduate students **John Baziuk** and **Modjeh Kamal** – who were visiting the east coast of Canada for the first time – expressed gratitude for the opportunity and "unforgettable experience" to discuss these large questions among their new-found Canadian peers. There was a profound sense of common ground being established and expanded, and an inspiring curiosity about the diversity of perspectives, enthusiasms and concerns.

As AANB architect Don Sterritt offered in a follow-up remark, "The conversation with Dalhousie students brought home the concept that this is a much broader initiative

than a professional workshop in a conference room. The notion that we were participating in an initiative that others are also addressing, from different perspectives, makes people aware that they are contributing to something significant."

The next challenge for both the academic and professional sectors is to expand the circle of conversation to even more public arenas.

Continuing the Conversation

The Canadian Architecture Forums on Education will continue its inclusive arc from East to West with CAFÉ Québec, hosted by the Université de Montréal, on November 11th. Subsequent CAFÉs include CAFÉ Ontario at Ryerson University on February 6, 2020; CAFÉ Prairie at the University of Manitoba on February 28; and CAFÉ West at the University of Calgary on March 12.

If you would like to participate in the CAFÉ initiative, but cannot attend in person, you may join the conversation by completing the CAFÉ Questionnaire and/or by responding to the Call for Manifestos, which invites you to creatively describe your vision, question or concern about the future of architecture.

Full details are available on the website: <https://architecturecanada.ca/> For the Survey and Call for Manifestos click ENGAGE.

For information on the national policy initiative, visit <http://riseforarchitecture.com/>

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