

café ONTARIO

Toward an Architecture Policy for Canada

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

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NEWS



“The existential threat of a changing climate must inform our personal, educational and professional practices.”

- Sustainability Collective
University of Waterloo

CAFÉ Ontario

On Thursday, February 6th 2020, over one hundred students, academics and professionals gathered in a former fish processing plant – now 307 Sidewalk Labs – to grapple with the slippery question of the future of architecture.

CAFÉ Ontario, the third in a series of Canadian Architecture Forums on Education, was organized by the Ryerson University M.Arch class of 2021 in conjunction with their annual student-led symposium. Student and faculty delegates joined the event from schools across Canada: from the University of British Columbia, Dalhousie University, University of Manitoba, University of Toronto and Waterloo University. The Sidewalk Labs innovation hub and community-outreach centre on Toronto's St. Lawrence Blvd East provided the perfect provocative setting for this transformational dialogue on how politics and architecture shape our communities.

Calls to Action and Awareness

CAFÉ Ontario started with a series of short presentations to set an aspirational tone for subsequent consultations.

Stephanie Steriotis, Ryerson M.Arch student and lead organizer of the symposium, launched the event by thanking the team and describing the tradition of Ryerson student leadership in engaging timely topics via public debate. The annual off-campus symposium mixes emergent and established voices on critical issues facing society, and challenges present and future professionals to rethink their role and modes of practice.

Lisa Landrum, CAFÉ Project Lead and Associate Dean Research at the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Architecture, shared an overview of the CAFÉ initiative and summarized past and upcoming events. The series of forums is involving all twelve University architecture programs in five forums over the course of one year, enabling the next generation of designers to envision a future architecture policy for Canada and to inform its priorities and ambition.

Craig Race, architect and co-founder of Lanescape, provided a compelling example of how policy-making and design-thinking can creatively coalesce. He described a vision for responsibly densifying Toronto's urban core with quality laneway housing and accessible greenspace via innovative zoning policy. Such micro-interventions are already having macro-effects for a more sustainable and pedestrian-friendly urban fabric.

Richard Witt, architect and principal at Quadrangle, shared lessons learned from the process of creating Ontario's first mid-rise mass timber building, 80 Atlantic. Taking advantage of a 2014 amendment to the Ontario Building Code, the award-winning five-story commercial complex features

exposed glulam beams and columns, supporting a nail-laminated timber floor. The result is not only a beautiful and bright open work space, but a building that acts as an agent of environmental change by sequestering carbon and offsetting more greenhouse gas intensive construction practices.

Next up, University of Toronto graduate students and GALDSU representatives shared initiatives and option studios at the Daniels Faculty of Architecture Landscape and Design. **Adam Krajewski**, **Valerie Marshall** and **Jana Nitschke** each reflected on how the Daniels pedagogy and new facility balances radical technology-enhanced design exploration with community engagement and experiential learning via global field trips.

Devin Arndt and **Nicole Rak**, M.Arch students and Sustainability Collective Directors at University of Waterloo, shared a variety of bottom-up student initiatives that are motivating institutional change. Their advocacy and activism include waste management systems for design studios, and principle-based climate actions that acknowledge inextricable links between architectural decisions, environmental rights and human rights.

Jesse Martyn and **Vincent Perron**, UBC graduate students and members of the Architecture Union of Students (ARCHUS), provided an overview of work and wellness strategies at the School of Architecture + Landscape Architecture (SALA). Studying in the context of Vancouver's housing crisis and investment-driven development, SALA students are grounded by environmental, ethical and speculative design approaches fostering resilience, social well-being, material knowledge, and fun.



“What is our role in architecture policy?”

- Equality in Architecture (EiA)
Dalhousie University



Finally, **Karen Mills** and **Sarah Yoes**, M.Arch students at Dalhousie University, shared the goals and accomplishments of the student-led organization Equality in Architecture (EiA). Aimed at supporting diversity in areas of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and accessibility, EiA is raising awareness within and beyond academia via knowledge-building workshops, research and special events.

Consultation & Conversation

Fueled by these examples of design and advocacy, CAFÉ Ontario participants turned their attention to a set of specific themes for discussion and debate. Thirteen groups joined the round table consultations on questions concerning architecture’s impact on Place, People, Prosperity and Potential.

Key take-aways from these animated conversations included the following insight: that any architecture policy must set ambitious yet open-ended goals, so as to be adaptable to different regions and attuned to change over time. For a country as large and diverse as Canada, policy adaptability to local conditions is a crucial challenge. One consultation group, which had focused on Prosperity, emphasized architecture’s role in shaping not simply buildings but society and identified the need to redefine the role of the architect in terms of listening to and interpreting the desires of communities. Another group discussing Prosperity asked *whose prosperity?* – suggesting equity and inclusion ought to be guiding principles in setting goals and assessing success. While there was some concern that status-quo development, suburban sprawl and revenue-driven design would be difficult to combat, it was highlighted that existing policies enabling such practices are devised by people, so people can change and improve

them. There was also an overwhelming sense that public education about the impact of design on daily life should be enhanced. As one group stressed: understanding architecture’s impact on environmental and social justice is not only broadly important, but urgent.

Architecture cannot be divorced from politics!

After a stimulating social break and delicious catered feast, participants reassembled for an engaging panel discussion. Moderated by former *Canadian Architect* editor **Ian Chodikoff**, the four panelists included: **Anne Cormier**, Professor and LEAP Researcher at the Université de Montréal, and co-founder of Atelier Big City, whose motto is “make architecture a public policy”; **Toon Dreessen**, President of DCA Architects in Ottawa, OAA past-President, and member of the working group mobilizing a national architecture policy and *Rise for Architecture* platform; **Peter Milczyn**, former Ontario Minister of Housing and architecturally-trained city-building strategist with PM Strategies; and **Alex Josephson**, lecturer at University of Toronto’s Daniels Faculty and co-founder of PARTISANS, an entrepreneurial architectural practice striving “to make the improbable possible.” Together, these politically-savvy maker-thinkers delved deeper into the role of architects in elevating public understanding of the value of design, and underscoring the links between architecture and politics and the need for more architecturally-trained individuals to serve in government.

Ongoing Discussion

The next morning, student leaders from three Universities met at *Page One* - a favorite café among Ryerson journalist students - to reflect and plan further initiatives.

Future Forums

The next forum – CAFÉ Prairie – will be hosted by the University of Manitoba on February 28, 2020, and will include a Nation-to-Nation conversation on Indigenous Principles, Perspectives and Practices. The fifth and final CAFÉ West will be hosted at the University of Calgary on March 12, 2020.

More Ways to Participate

Aside from attending a CAFÉ in person, anyone can participate in the initiative by completing the online survey and/or by responding to the Call for Manifestos, which invites students to describe a vision, question or concern about the future of architecture. All feedback will help shape the priorities and ambition of any future architecture policy for Canada. Full details are available on the website: <https://architecturecanada.ca>

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/Lisa Landrum

