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Editorial Article

Evidence, Dialogue, Recognition, and the Renewal of Architectural Education

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Abstract

This editorial introduces a collection of five reports treated as articles arising from the work of the UIA Architectural Education Commission (EDUCOM) during the 2023–2026 triennium. Read together, the articles constitute a single research programme pursued through complementary instruments: a pilot inquiry into the architectural education systems of seventeen countries; a census-scale examination of 345 schools of architecture in 159 countries; a two-year sequence of five international webinars; a synthesis of three editions of the UIA Award for Innovation in Architectural Education; and an institutional account of how the Commission's mandate was discharged, culminating in the revised UNESCO-UIA Charter. The editorial traces the logic that connects these instruments, including measurement, dialogue, recognition, and codification and draws out three threads that run across them: first is the distance between declared values and curricular delivery; second is the unequal distribution of the means of educational transformation; and third is the enlargement of the architect's professional self. It concludes by identifying what the collection makes possible for educators, accreditors, professional bodies, and the incoming Commission, and by arguing that the evidence established through these efforts shifts the burden of proof in debates about the future of architectural education.

Keywords: Architectural education; UIA EDUCOM; Evidence-based reform; Design pedagogy; UNESCO-UIA Charter; Pedagogical innovation; Professional identity of the architect; International Union of Architects (UIA)

Highlights

- Introduces five interlinked articles documenting the research programme of the UIA Architectural Education Commission, 2023–2026.
- Frames measurement, dialogue, recognition, and codification as four complementary instruments of global educational reform.
- Identifies the implementation gap, the unequal means of change, and the architect's enlarged professional self as the collection's central threads.

1 A Discipline Asked to Account for Itself

Every discipline reaches moments when its habitual self-descriptions stop doing useful work. For architectural education, that moment has been building for more than a decade and can no longer be delayed. The demands placed on the architecture graduate have multiplied, including fluency in carbon accounting and lifecycle thinking; competence with computational and increasingly intelligent tools; the ability to work with communities rather than simply on their behalf; and the judgement to operate within regulatory, political, and cultural systems that no single profession controls. Schools have responded with revised mission statements, new electives, expanded statements of graduate attributes, and a steady output of manifestos. What has remained scarce is a means of knowing, not only asserting, what the world's schools of architecture actually do, how national systems differ, which pedagogical experiments genuinely work, and where declared commitments outrun the capacity to honour them.

The five report articles included in this collection are an attempt to supply that missing knowledge. They document the programme of the UIA Architectural Education Commission (EDUCOM) during the 2023–2026 triennium, undertaken with the counsel of UNESCO Delegate Jana Revedin and the voluntary contribution of Commission members drawn from all five UIA regions. Each article stands on its own and carries its own abstract; the purpose of this editorial is therefore not to summarise them but to explain the design that binds them, to indicate what each contributes to the whole, and to designate the questions this collection leaves open for the discipline and for the Commission that follows.

We write in the double capacity of editors and authors, and we are conscious of the risk this proximity carries. It also carries an advantage that we have tried to use critically rather than celebrationally: the connective tissue between the five articles, including the sequencing decisions, the adjustments made when instruments underperformed, the points at which one strand of work redirected another, is visible to us in a way that no external commentary could reconstruct. It is that connective tissue, more than any single finding, that we believe holds the greatest value for readers concerned with how educational change at a global scale can be organised and pursued.

2 Four Instruments, One Programme

The collection is best read as an exercise in method as much as in content. Confronted with a mandate that stretched from reviewing the UNESCO-UIA Charter to defining an education adequate to challenges that are not yet fully legible, the Commission resolved early that no single instrument could carry the weight. Four were adopted, and the five articles map onto them.

Measurement came first. The pilot inquiry (Harrington, Salama, and Patil, 2026) tested whether comparable information about national architectural education systems could be gathered at all, and at what depth; the global survey (Salama, Harrington, and Patil, 2026) then scaled the approach from the level of the national system to the level of the individual school. Dialogue ran alongside: the international webinar series (Harrington and Salama, 2026) submitted emerging findings and positions to sustained interrogation by educators, practitioners, and representatives of allied disciplines across two years. Recognition operated through the UIA Award for Innovation in Architectural Education, whose three completed cycles are consolidated in this issue (Salama and Harrington, 2026) into a comparative archive of pedagogical exemplars. Codification, finally, is the register of the triennial account (Salama and Harrington, 2026), which records how evidence, dialogue, and recognition merged on the revision of the Charter approved by the UIA Council in April 2026 and presented for ratification at the Barcelona Congress.

The sequence matters more than the inventory. Measurement without dialogue produces datasets that no community owns; dialogue without measurement reproduces the anecdotalism under which the field has laboured for decades; recognition without either rewards visibility rather than substance; and codification without all three yields charters that decorate rather than direct. The claim implicit in the collection but made explicit in this editorial. It is that reform of professional education at a global scale

requires these four instruments operating in deliberate relation to one another. The articles in this issue allow readers to judge how far that claim is instigated.



Figure 1. Four instruments, one programme: the design connecting the efforts of the EDUCOM 2023–2026 triennium (Source: Authors)

3 Establishing the Baseline: From Systems to Schools

The pilot inquiry occupies a modest position in the sequence but a foundational one in the logic. Its seventeen national cases were never intended to be statistically representative; they were chosen to test whether the categories through which architectural education is usually discussed [programme structure, practical training, accreditation, curricular priorities] could travel across radically different contexts and still return usable information. The answer was a qualified yes. Some categories travelled well, where questions about degree architecture, internship arrangements, and accreditation status yielded dense, comparable material. Others, such as inclusivity, gender equity, the treatment of indigenous knowledge, returned answers so uneven in depth that the unevenness itself became a finding, indicating where institutional self-knowledge is thin and where future inquiry must be designed differently. The pilot also surfaced the sheer asymmetry of the profession's infrastructure.

Registration figures ranging across three orders of magnitude between participating countries are not a question of scale; they condition everything downstream, from the availability of internship placements to the plausibility of practice-based teaching. Any global conversation about educational standards that ignores this asymmetry, the pilot suggests, will legislate for conditions that most of the world's schools do not inhabit.

The global survey converts these methodological lessons into a census-scale account. Its double optic which included nine dimensions describing the institutional anatomy of 345 schools, and ten thematic lenses tracking the circulation of contemporary agendas, permits a question the discipline has rarely been able to ask with precision: not whether schools espouse or adopt transformation, but how far espousal has penetrated curriculum structures and pedagogical practices. Read across its findings, a consistent pattern emerges that we would propose as the survey's interpretive key: adoption follows the

cost gradient. Agendas that can be absorbed rhetorically, or accommodated through electives and studio briefs, spread rapidly and are now close to universal. Agendas that demand structural change, such as reordering assessment, recomposing faculties, redistributing curricular time, unsettling inherited canons, remain minority pursuits regardless of how prominently they feature in the discipline's public commitments. The distance between the two is not randomly distributed; it maps onto resources, region, and institutional seniority in ways the survey documents aspect by aspect.

The two studies should be read as complements rather than as a small study superseded by a large one. The pilot reaches what the global survey, by design, cannot, where the voices of academic leaders and practitioners describing their systems from within, with the texture, hesitation, and occasional contradiction that self-report carries. The global survey reaches what the pilot cannot, where the breadth sufficient to distinguish pattern from coincidence, and a documentary basis, drawn from institutional records rather than individual testimony, that permits verifiable comparison. Where the two converge, as they do on the standardisation of programme structures and on the uneven treatment of equity agendas, the finding can be held with unusual confidence. Where they diverge, the divergence itself directs future inquiry toward the space between what institutions publish and declare and what their members report in implementation.

4 Dialogue as Method

Numbers, however comprehensive, do not explain themselves. The webinar series was conceived to supply what enumeration cannot, including reasons, resistances, and vocabularies. Across five sittings between June 2024 and March 2026, the series built a cumulative argument rather than a sequence of disconnected events, opening with the condition of the architect's role across pedagogy, practice, and policy; moving through emerging pedagogical trends or currents and the alignment of architecture with its neighbouring built-environment disciplines; turning inward to the circuitry that connects research, teaching, and practice; and closing with the case for placing the socius at the centre of studio culture.

Two features of the series deserve emphasis in this context. The first is the deliberate geography of its voices. Convening speakers from every UIA region in each phase of the argument, the series ensured that positions formed in profoundly different institutional worlds were placed in direct conversation, resisting the gravitational pull that ordinarily draws such discussions toward a small set of well-resourced schools in familiar locations in Europe and North America. The second is its function within the wider programme. Several of the thematic lenses through which the global survey reads contemporary education were first articulated in webinar discussion, and webinar debate in turn tested survey findings against the lived experience of those teaching under the conditions the data described. Dialogue, in this design, is not dissemination after the fact; it is an instrument of inquiry in its own right, and the article documenting the series should be read as a record of knowledge production, not of proceedings.

5 The Uses of Recognition

The synthesis of the Award's three editions adds a longitudinal instrument to the programme. An award functions as a slow measurement device. In essence, what juries choose to honour, sustained over successive cycles, tells the field what excellence is coming to mean. Across the three editions, the consolidated record shows submissions growing in number and geographic range, and it shows the honoured programmes converging on a recognisable profile, where learning embedded in real communities and real sites, vernacular and traditional knowledge treated as an active design resource not a heritage museum, full-scale making as a medium of both education and assessment, and, most recently, pedagogies organised as networks operating across institutions and borders.

Recognition also reveals and exposes deficits. The third-edition jury's observation that inclusive learning was the least convincingly evidenced criterion is, in its way, as significant as any finding in the surveys: it locates the point at which the discipline's aspirational vocabulary runs ahead of its documented practice, and it does so from within the community of schools most committed to

innovation. The Award thus operates in tandem with the Charter and with validation processes and not in parallel to them. The Charter articulates principle, validation assures the baseline, and the Award identifies the leading edge and, by documenting it, renders it transferable to schools working in very different conditions.

6 The Institutional Record and the Weight of Codification

The triennial account closes the collection by turning the Commission's instruments on itself. It records how the mandate agreed with the UIA President was translated into a connected programme of work; it is candid about what fell short, where engagement with practice thinner than intended, under-represented language communities not reached systematically, workstreams on inclusion and architectural literacy left for successors to take up; and it advances the argument that the whole collection has been assembling: that the discipline's defining condition is not an absence of ambition but a gap between declared values and the institutional capacity to operationalise and implement them.

The revision of the UNESCO-UIA Charter is where that argument acquires normative force. A preamble framing architecture as a practice of regenerative justice, new guidance on artificial intelligence in pedagogy and practice, and a formalised revision rhythm together represent codification of a particular kind: not aspiration drafted in advance of evidence, but principle distilled from three years of measurement, dialogue, and recognition. Whether the revised Charter escapes the fate the collection diagnoses — declarations accumulating faster than delivery — will depend on the machinery built around it in the coming cycle, and that question passes, deliberately and explicitly, to the 2026–2029 Commission.

The question was, in fact, first put to the international community in person. On 29 June 2026, during the 29th UIA World Congress of Architects in Barcelona (27 June – 2 July), the Commission convened two consecutive sessions and contributed to a third session of Architectural for All Work Programme Panel Led by Sherine Wahba, at the *Centre de Convencions Internacional de Barcelona*.

- The first, *Being and Becoming Architects in a Changing World*, presented the full range of Commission activities, including the surveys, the webinar series, and the third edition of the Award, and included a reflection on the Charter revision by UNESCO Delegate Jana Revedin; it was framed deliberately not as a progress report but as a provocation, asking whether architectural education can embrace transformation without losing its disciplinary identity.
- The second, *Shaping Built-Environment Future Mindsets*, brought EDUCOM together with EAEE, IFLA, ISOCARP, ACE, and FPAA, represented respectively by Roberto Cavallo, Marina Cervera, Şebnem Hoşkara, Dubravko Bačić, and María Samaniego, for a moderated panel on the future of built-environment education at a moment when professional boundaries are dissolving.

Both sessions generated lively debate, where position statements were contested from the floor, the tension between common pedagogical ground and distinct disciplinary formations surfaced repeatedly, and exchanges continued well beyond the allotted time. The vigour of those discussions confirmed the appetite for precisely the conversation this collection now extends in print and online — the Congress serving not merely as the occasion of publication but as the forum in which the programme documented here was placed before the international community for scrutiny, contestation, and, where the argument persuades, adoption.



Figure 2. EDUCOM sessions at the 29th UIA World Congress of Architects, Barcelona, 29 June 2026: panellists and audiences at "Being and Becoming Architects in a Changing World" and "Shaping Built-Environment Future Mindsets," Centre de Convencions Internacional de Barcelona (Source: Authors).

7 Three Threads, and the Road to 2029

Analytically read together the five articles integrate the following three threads.

- The first thread is the implementation gap already named. We would add here what the individual articles, bound by their evidence, could not: the gap is not a moral failing of schools but a predictable outcome of incentive structures, including accreditation regimes that audit inputs rather than transformation, academic reward systems that price research output above teaching, and funding environments in which the additive elective is always cheaper than the structural reform. Closing the gap is therefore a question of institutional design, not of exhortation, and the levers lie as much with accreditors, ministries, and professional bodies as with schools themselves.
- The second thread is the unequal distribution of the means of change. From the pilot's registration asymmetries to the survey's account of digital infrastructure and the concentration of research capacity, the collection shows that the capacity to respond to shared global agendas is anything but shared. If the coming decade treats advanced computation, environmental simulation, and research-integrated teaching as the price of legitimacy, a substantial fraction of the world's schools will be defined as deficient by standards they were never resourced to meet. The alternative, including regional consortia, open curricula, South–South exchange, context-sensitive accreditation, appears across the articles as scattered practice; making it systematic is among the clearest tasks the collection sets for the years ahead.

- The third thread concerns the architect's professional self. Across surveys, webinar discourse, and award citations, the same figure keeps surfacing: a practitioner formed as listener, mediator, collaborator, and civic agent, for whom design authority is exercised with and through others rather than over them. The collection suggests that this figure is no longer aspirational rhetoric; it is documented in awarded programmes, argued across regions, and partially traceable in curricula, but also that it remains institutionally fragile, cultivated by committed individuals more often than guaranteed and supported by systems or university mechanisms. Being and becoming an architect, the phrase under which the Commission presented this work in Barcelona, names exactly this unfinished movement between what the discipline forms by intent and what it forms by default.

What, then, does this collection make possible? We conceive a response as follows:

- For educators, a means of locating their own programme within a global field rather than a national anecdote.
- For accreditors and professional bodies, an evidence base against which frameworks can be recalibrated.
- For researchers, open questions in abundance, including longitudinal tracking of the implementation gap, closer study of the political economy of curricular change, and the graduate-outcome data that no instrument in this programme could reach.
- For the incoming Commission, a foundation explicitly built to be extended rather than repeated.

The burden of proof in debates about architectural education has shifted. In essence, claims about what schools do, and about what they should do next, can now be tested against a shared body of evidence. That, more than any single finding, is what this triennium and the effort of the UIA Architectural Education Commission sought to deliver; it is offered here in the conviction that the future of the built environment is decided, first and last, in how architects are formed.

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Informed Consent Statement

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