

# Research Policy

(Background Statement included)



Australian  
Institute of  
Architects

endorsed by  
National Council  
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## **AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS RESEARCH POLICY**

### **DEFINITION OF ARCHITECTURAL RESEARCH**

*Architectural research is the systematic inquiry for new knowledge about the creation and maintenance of the built environment. The process of identifying new knowledge involves making a clear statement of the research goals and intent of the research, implementing credible and systematic modes of inquiry, and documenting the findings in a form that is publicly verifiable and open to peer appraisal. The architectural design process can be a form of research inquiry when it incorporates these goals and processes.*

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH POLICY**

In developing a policy of architectural research, the Institute adopts the following objectives:

- .1 To promote architectural research as an endeavour that will increase the knowledge base for the practice of architecture.
- .2 To understand and respond to the global context for architectural research.
- .3 To understand and respond to the local context for architectural research within Australia.
- .4 To clarify how the activity of architectural design can be undertaken as a legitimate research endeavour.
- .5 To promote the culture of architectural research within the architectural profession by encouraging practice to become involved in research endeavours.
- .6 To promote collaborative architectural research endeavours between academia, the profession, related disciplines and industry partners.
- .7 To make recommendations and develop a strategy to increase the amount and breadth of architectural research undertaken by academia, the profession and students of architecture.
- .8 To disseminate the findings in an accessible and appropriate format.

## **POLICY STATEMENTS**

### **Recognising a range of professional activities as research.**

The Institute maintains that architectural research should contribute to the breadth of professional activities and interests, both current and in terms of future directions. The Institute maintains that architectural design, as well as other activities carried out within practice, can be considered as forms of architectural research if they meet following criteria:

- The research goals in response to a question or proposition are clearly defined,
- A credible, systematic method of inquiry relevant and acceptable to the research domain is utilised,
- Significant results are thoroughly documented, publicly verifiable, open to peer review and reflect that the solution enhances understanding and contributes to new knowledge within the discipline.

### **Encouraging a culture of research within the profession.**

The Institute recognises the importance of research to the future of the profession, that research should be an integral part of a professional education, and that it provides a solid basis for best practice. The Institute is committed to widening the knowledge of research within the profession and the understanding of its importance. The Institute will encourage and support architectural research in the work and the practice of the profession, and in the teaching of architecture in the universities.

### **Supporting links between the profession, the schools of architecture and research bodies.**

The Institute promotes and supports collaborative research that links the profession, the construction industry, the universities and government. The Institute believes that research is a critical activity to be undertaken by all schools of architecture in the nation.

### **Promoting an international research focus.**

The Institute is committed to building collaborative research partnerships with other countries and to benchmarking Australian architectural research with that occurring in other countries.

## **BACKGROUND**

Architecture and its practice is a diverse endeavour. It is a discipline that deals constantly with a wide range of issues including: design, environmental sustainability, economics, management, material physics, structures, technology, socio-cultural, heritage and urban issues, histories, community needs and many others. Research that contributes to the development of the body of architectural knowledge can encompass any of these diverse interests of the profession. A definition of architectural research must therefore encompass a diverse range of research modes and typologies. The discipline, through its various activities, produces research outcomes and these contribute to the development of the body of knowledge that directly benefits the wider community through improvement of and innovation in architecture and the built environment.

The Institute acknowledges the quality of architectural research presently being carried out as well as that undertaken in the past. The Institute considers however that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is both the opportunity and the need for all activity that contributes to architectural knowledge to be recognised as research by the profession, the academy and government, and for architectural research to be actively encouraged and promoted by the Institute.

The Institute also considers that the ways in which architectural research is defined, undertaken and acknowledged needs to be broadened so that a range of activities presently performed by architects that contribute not just to practice but to the discipline of architecture might be considered to be 'equivalent' to research endeavours in other disciplines.

Why is this considered necessary? There are many reasons, some of which are listed below.

- .1 The work of architects defines, in large part, the quality and amenity of the built environment. Architecture, informed by more and better research, will deliver a significant community benefit.

- .2 In order to ensure that its service to the community is of the highest quality, the architectural profession must extend and enrich the knowledge base upon which its actions are based. As the originators and custodians together with the academies of new knowledge in the field of architecture, the profession must maintain its commitment to the research process.
- .3 The architectural profession is competing globally for architectural projects and would benefit substantially if collaborative research were to be undertaken in relevant topics so as to provide international benchmarking and the most up-to-date knowledge base for architectural decisions.
- .4 As for other professions, the modes of architectural practice and the range of informational needs within Australia are undergoing significant structural change. It would seem logical to undertake research relating to these changes in order to assist small, medium and large practices alike to adapt to changing demands and global conditions.
- .5 The Australian architectural profession has achieved internationally recognised acclaim for facets of its work such as its achievements for the 2000 Olympics and other significant recent buildings, but this work has not been widely documented. The knowledge acquired in building the Olympic infrastructure remains largely within the private confines of the individual practices involved. Unless research in areas such as this is undertaken very soon, this knowledge will be lost. The profession can neither use it collectively, nor can it be used as a basis for the teaching of architecture students.
- .6 Universities are increasingly being encouraged to undertake collaborative public-private research and research on a larger scale in order to contribute to the knowledge economy of the nation, with the reward being an improvement in their funding base. This emphasis on collaboration is an important development, as academic research in the field of

architecture has in the past been carried out primarily by individuals located within the schools of architecture. These conditions encourage the development of new and constructive research partnerships between academics, practitioners, government agencies, the building industry and other stakeholders.

- .7 Professional courses such as architecture are a relatively recent inclusion within the academy, and there tends to be a mismatch in some places between the scientific tradition of research that is well understood and encouraged within the university, and the research interests and outputs of a professionally oriented course. This situation is changing in some of the nation's universities, but needs encouragement to continue to change and to change nation wide.
- .8 Commonwealth funding continues to reward the research outputs of more conventional research and scholarly activities, while the recognition of the contributions made by creative, artistic and professional works that contribute to the body of knowledge of the discipline continue to be limited.

An Institute research policy is therefore necessary in order to:

- i. provide an inclusive definition and conceptualisation of *architectural* research;
- ii. provide direction for new areas of research;
- iii. develop credible evaluation methods capable of recognising the contribution of creative, artistic and professional works alongside more conventional research and scholarship that contribute to the body of knowledge in the discipline; and
- iv. help gain recognition for the work being done by architects that is not currently recognised as research, but that contributes to the creation of architectural knowledge.

## VIEWS ON ARCHITECTURAL RESEARCH

In defining architectural research, The Institute for Architectural Research (IAR) of the American Institute of Architects defines architectural research as follows.

*“Architectural research is the search for new knowledge and new ideas about the built environment. Research can be conducted in a variety of sub disciplines. In each area of architectural research, certain presuppositions and fundamental beliefs guide and determine the appropriate focus and method of inquiry, as well as the significance and merit of each research project. While the parameters of these research approaches vary, there are some common characteristics among them:*

- *“Architectural research efforts are those that have clearly identifiable goals at the outset of the research, where the project is directed to respond to a question.*
- *“In pursuing that question, one follows a credible, systematic method or mode of inquiry, relevant and acceptable to the research domain in which one is operating.*
- *“This process results in significant results laid out in a thorough, documented manner which reflects a solution or enhances understanding/knowledge within the research domain.*

*“It should be noted that design can be a form of research inquiry if it incorporates the three characteristics listed above.”<sup>1</sup>*

A more generic definition is offered by the International Union of Architects (UIA) who describes research and innovation in architecture as “systematic inquiry, the result of which is new knowledge.”<sup>2</sup>

Other definitions are consistent: In assessing academic staff across all disciplines for promotion, *“Research/scholarship/creative work”* is defined by the University of Sydney as “The creation, extension, synthesis, consolidation, application and critical appraisal of

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<sup>1</sup> Initiative for Architectural Research. *“About IAR: Mission”*, retrieved September 3, 2002, from <http://www.iaronline.org/mission.html> 2002.

<sup>2</sup> International Union of Architects (UIA), *UIA and Architectural Education Reflections and Recommendations*, Version 16(A) March, 2002, p.18.

knowledge. It also includes creative and artistic work where these relate to the discipline area of the applicant.”<sup>3</sup>

The Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) accepts that “The essential characteristic of research activity is that it leads to publicly verifiable outcomes which are open to peer appraisal. Research and experimental development comprises: creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humanity, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications.”<sup>4</sup>

As suggested recently in an Association of Architecture Schools of Australasia (AASA) report, these definitions have in common that research, scholarship *and creative work* must each and equally demonstrate evidence of being a sustained program and body of work that is in the pursuit of knowledge, is original in concept and has contributed to the discipline. Examples may include scholarly authored or edited books, research papers published in refereed academic journals or recognised professional print or electronic journals, chapters in books or major refereed conference proceedings, as well as experimental development including design, art, compositions, plays, films, recordings, performances, design prototypes, professional projects, etc., which may be disseminated by being exhibited in solo or group shows as recognised venues or included in significant collections, curated thematic exhibitions at recognised venues, recorded by reputable producers or professional companies, and including critical acclaim for research, scholarly or creative work by significant citations to one’s work by others in books or recognised professional or artistic journals, or other forms of dissemination highly respected in the discipline.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> University of Sydney Academic Promotions 2003 Policy Document, [http://www.usyd.edu.au/su/personnel/policy/promotions/2003/b\\_e.html#section1\\_2](http://www.usyd.edu.au/su/personnel/policy/promotions/2003/b_e.html#section1_2), p 10.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Education, Science and Teaching, Higher Education Research Data Collection, Specifications for the Collection of 2002 Data. Canberra: DEST, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Moore, G.T., Recommendations for the parity of creative, artistic and professional work with traditional forms of research and scholarship. Association of Architecture Schools of Australasia 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference, Melbourne, September 2003.

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Institute's research policy was developed according to the following terms of reference.

- .1 Consideration of the various definitions of research
- .2 With awareness of current research being undertaken in schools of architecture within Australia.
- .3 With consultation with a number of architectural professionals within Australia as to their attitude to architectural research.
- .4 With reference to policies of the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) as to their definitions and policies with regard to research in architecture and related disciplines.
- .5 With reference to research policies, if any, adopted by architectural institutions outside Australia.
- .6 With awareness of the extent and kind of research undertaken globally within the discipline of architecture both by professionals and within the academy.

