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Summary Report

ACSA Teachers Summit: Summit for Climate Agency

7-8 July, 2022

Pratt Institute School of Architecture, Brooklyn, New York

<https://www.acsa-arch.org/conference/2022-teachers-summit/>

This report summarises observations and learnings from the 2022 ACSA Teachers Summit, which focused on how climate agency is fostered in architecture education by “teaching the design experiment”. The two-day event was hosted by the Pratt Institute, School of Architecture as a follow-up from the 2021 ACSA/EAAE Teacher’s Conference *Curriculum for Climate Agency*. A series of roundtable discussions and workshops broadly responded to the provocation of how architects might bring field research and design together through education.

The event was grounded on the premise that climate change requires architects to engage with the natural sciences. As such, experimental architectural approaches, including ideas of observation, hypothesis, testing, and analysis, were foregrounded throughout the conference, as well as in the final exhibition event *Experimental Landings*.

Australasian Perspectives at the Summit

I was initially invited as a respondent to the opening panel event, however, one of the speakers was unavailable and I was invited to give a presentation on the Climate Literacy and Action in Architecture Education project.

Through this, I highlighted the support provided by the Association of Architecture Schools of Australasia (AASA), both in terms of my attendance at the event, and through funding provided to conduct the Climate Literacy and Action in Architecture Education project. I shared the findings from that research and our Australasia-wide survey, situating the challenge of climate literacy in architecture education according to our specific regional challenges. This included recent changes to the NSCA, climate events in Australia, as well as highlighting the importance of understanding the student cohorts we engage with through architecture education. The methods of the study were shared, including an emphasis on the compelling degree of ‘motivation to act’ felt by architecture staff and students alike in our region.

I concluded with practical examples about how I have applied teaching on climate change through courses, while relating this back to the findings of the research — drawing on the importance of integrated, hopeful, and collaborative approaches to climate literacy in architecture education.

The proceeding panel discussion indicated that American schools of architecture are in a similar state of flux, in attempting to incorporate issues of climate in their curricula. Including the need for support to address curriculum review.

After my talk, I was approached by Sharon Haar (President of ACSA and Professor at Taubman College). ACSA are interested in conducting a similar study and have asked us to give another, more broad-reaching webinar presentation to a national audience.

Event Themes

I have summarised knowledge shared through presentations and workshops at the event according to five main themes, which I will go on to synthesise further. (1) Climate, Temporality, and Intangibility; (2) Climate and Social Justice; (3) Climate and Indigenous Perspectives; (4) Climate and Emerging Technologies; (5) Climate Change and Pedagogy.

1. Climate, **Temporality, and Intangibility**

- The inherent temporal nature of architecture positions the discipline to assist with both climate mitigation strategies, as well as adaptive.¹
- Architecture education needs to engage with new methods of measuring or quantifying non-material aspects of architecture, including alternative drawing types (an example provided was cosmograms).²
- How we understand *air* in architecture, was expanded upon as a material consideration, especially with regard to climatic considerations. Pneumatic structures and inflatable architecture were discussed, which also connects to current discourse around indoor air quality and Covid-19.³
- Architects are being called on to find new ways to draw what has been previously treated as “invisible matter” in conventional drawings — for example, earth, water, sky. This points to the potential power of reimagining the traditional section to better represent these aspects of our environment and architecture’s relationship to them.⁴

2. Climate and **Social Justice**

- The concept of a “capitalist dystopia” was presented as the current context within which architecture education exists, as well as a condition of “anthropocentric narcissism”.⁵
- Social diversity and spatial justice was discussed via a studio project set in the Borough of Queens run by the Spitzer School of Architecture. The program involved a teaching

¹ Harriett Harriss

² David Salomon

³ Rafael Beneytez

⁴ David Salomon

⁵ Harriett Harriss

collaboration between Nandini Bagchee and an anthropologist. In this program, architecture was considered to be an apparatus for social processes. Of note was the value of a year-long studio for engaging with studio problems of this complexity.⁶

3. Climate and **Indigenous Perspectives**

- Both Harriet Harris (Dean of the Pratt Institute School of Architecture) and Michelle Murphy (keynote) introduced the concept of “Indigenous futurisms”, and provided an important link between environmental damage as a form of violence against First Nations people.
- Michelle Murphy (Preferred name: Murphy, they/them) leads the *Environmental Data Justice Lab*, which is Indigenous-led and couples First Nations knowledge with science and chemistry expertise as a vehicle for advocacy against environmental violence.
- The premise of *what climate is* (beyond weather) was connected to settler colonial histories, Christian theologies of entitlement, possession of land, and capitalism giving humans “permission to pollute”.
- Murphy connected these ideas to “racial capitalism” as a driver of climate change and ecological justice, ultimately arguing that pollution is a form of colonisation.⁷

4. Climate and **Emerging Technologies**

- Three parallel VR workshops were run on day 2, to highlight the potential of VR technology and Oculus headsets in gaining access and understandings of remote locations, including informally developed areas.⁸
- Brittany Utting and Daniel Jacobs of practice ‘Home Office’ talked about data-driven measurement, calibration and organisation of contextual information. This included using territorial monitoring devices that do not disrupt ecosystems to map multi species and industrial impacts.
- Their work includes forest sensors, data tagging, climate change monitoring. It also connects to decentralised power and the politics of nature, blurring the binary divisions between wilderness and civilisation.

⁶ Nandini Bagchee

⁷ Michelle Murphy

⁸ I attended Dongsei Kim’s workshop

5. Climate Change and **Pedagogy**

- The forest sensors and monitoring devices mentioned previously were described as able to facilitate a “collective pedagogical experience”, in which education and research are combined.
- Further, environmental activism and the data they collect is communicated using artistic means such as texture mapping of territories,⁹ making the work interdisciplinary in nature.
- Architecture education accreditation in the US is seen to be falling short.¹⁰
- Pratt School of Architecture offers student prizes in ‘Social Justice’ and ‘Climate Action’
- The idea of an “unending pedagogy” was introduced during Harriet Harriss’ welcome, which connected throughout many of the talks and workshops.

Future Opportunities

On behalf of the Climate Literacy and Action in Architecture Education research team, I'd like to extend sincere gratitude for the opportunity to attend this event and to represent the Association of Architecture Schools of Australasia (AASA).

During the event, I was able to connect with Sharon Haar (President of ACSA and Professor at Taubman College), Robert Gonzales (past-president and Dean of Architecture at UNM), and June Williamson (Chair of Architecture at the Spitzer School of Architecture, CCNY), as well as the ACSA Executive Director Michael Monti (and his staff).

They expressed interest in convening an ACSA Teachers Summit in Australia, with very early email follow-up correspondence underway. If this conversation gains further traction, the research team will connect ACSA Executive Director with Martha Liew.

⁹ Brittany Utting and Daniel Jacobs

¹⁰ Harriet Harriss