

Architectural Studies in the European Higher Education Area and in Greece: A Comparison Based on Accreditation Reports' Findings

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Abstract: The changes in higher education the last three decades were tremendous. From the Humbolt University in Germany to the American research university and nowadays to the Global university. European Union, trying to answer the brain drain to (mainly) U.S.A, and at the same time support its higher education system, boosted the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and its precursor, the Bologna Declaration (1999). The goal was to create a higher education system with common rules, easily recognized worldwide and promoted as the place to be for quality studies. Nowadays, 49 countries participate in EHEA, having agreed to important changes over the years, creating universities with 3 study cycles, cooperation, and quality assurance, supportive to students and staff mobility, focusing in learning results and supporting employability, innovation, and interdisciplinary studies, giving equal access to all. Architectural studies have been influenced by these changes as well. In Europe, architecture is a study subject in more than 350 schools of the 49 EHEA countries, with, equal characteristics in duration, content of study and degrees granted. In Greece there are seven schools of architecture. In this article we examine the most recent accreditation reports, to record their adaption to the Bologna Process suggestions and the state of art in architectural studies in Greece.

Key words: analysis of education, architectural studies, Bologna process, accreditation reports, architectural studies in Greece

1. Introduction

The Bologna process, which began with the signing of the Bologna Declaration (European Ministers in charge of Higher Education 1999) and continues with the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Bologna Follow-up Group 2010), was the occasion for very important changes in the higher education systems in the 49 countries that currently participate in it. The initially proposed changes aimed to reform and harmonize European higher education systems, promoting the mobility of people through Europe and the internationalization of the Higher Education Institutions (Kovacevic Dagen, 2022). Those were the basis for more comprehensive proposals agreed in the successive councils of the competent ministers (Table 1). Greece participates in the process since the signing of the Declaration and monitors the proposed changes, although not with absolute compliance (Kyriazis & Asderaki 2008).

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Table 1 Main Points of the Bologna Declaration and Subsequent Additions

Bologna Declaration Proposals (1999)

- Comparable and easy-to-understand qualifications - Diploma Supplement
 - Two study cycles: Bachelor (3 years) Master (2 years)
 - European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)
 - Promotion of mobility for both students and teachers
 - Quality assurance with inter-institutional collaboration
 - Promotion of a European dimension of higher education
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Proposals added after the Bologna Declaration (2001–2020)

- Lifelong learning
 - European Framework of Professional Qualifications (EQF)
 - 3rd cycle of doctoral studies
 - learning outcomes
 - social dimension of higher education
 - enhancing graduate mobility and employability
 - innovation in teaching and learning
 - interdisciplinarity
 - removing barriers to access in higher education for all
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Source: Konstantinidou, 2023.

The Bologna Declaration and the ministerial conferences that followed (known as the Bologna process) suggested some tools to assist mobility for studies, such as the Diploma Supplement, ECTS, European Qualification Framework and later on Learning Outcomes. Let's see what each of these tools stands for.

The Diploma Supplement (DS) is a document which provides information on the nature, level, context, content, and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the individual who holds the original degree to which the DS is attached¹. It is bilingual, that is in the language of the institution issuing the DS and in English and is given together with the corresponding degree.

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) represent learning based on defined learning outcomes and their associated workload², allowing students to have some study period in another institution and acknowledge what they have learned during the mobility period. To get a 1st level degree usually 180 or 240 ECTS are necessary, when each study year gives 60 ECTS.

The European Qualification Framework (EQF)³ describes with its 8 levels all the learning outcomes from basic reading and math skills (level 1) to individual research and capacity to develop analytical and critical thinking and understanding (PhD, level 8) in any working field. EQF facilitates mobility of workers and degree holders for further studies, making the recognition of former acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities easier.

Learning Outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate at the end of a study period and represent a way to communicate external reference points at the regional, national, and international levels (Adam, 2006).

Within the EHEA, the speed and way of the implementation of the changes are influenced by national education agendas and priorities, as well as by the date that each country joined the process (Crosier & Parveva, 2013). Each country follows its own agenda, and in some cases implemented only partially the suggested measures. All the above tools and the suggested changes are also implemented to countries outside Europe in a

¹ Available online at: <https://www.auth.gr/en/diploma-supplement-en/>, accessed on 14 Jan. 2024.

² Available online at: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system>, accessed on 14 Jan. 2024.

³ Available online at: https://www.ehea.info/Upload/TPG_A_QF_RO_MK_1_EQF_Brochure.pdf, accessed on 14 Jan. 2024.

way significantly affected by the socio-economic, political, historical, and cultural context of each region (Zmas 2015), making Bologna a worldwide discourse.

Greece has participated in the Bologna process (BP) since the beginning, signing the Bologna Declaration, and followed its own pace in implementing the suggested tools and changes. Since 2005, Law 3374/2005 regulates quality assurance in higher education, the establishment of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and the Diploma Supplement (Kyriazis & Asderaki, 2008). The two, and later three, study cycles have been adopted in most of the study areas. In architectural studies, the title is granted after 300 ECTS and five years of study, being recognized as an integrated master (Law 4485/2017). Quality assurance is monitored through periodical internal and external evaluation reports. Regarding the measures added after the Bologna Declaration, Lifelong learning is supported in many fields and a public body monitor and is used to evaluate the knowledge gained. The European Qualification Framework is applied in most study fields and the description of lessons in higher education includes learning results. Greek Universities embrace innovation in teaching and learning and cooperate with other scientific areas in interdisciplinary post graduate programs (Law 4957/2022).

The seven schools of architecture in Greece are following the proposed changes regarding the accreditation of their undergraduate programs and the assurance of the quality of the studies offered, with the recent processes starting in 2020 and ending in 2023. These accreditation reports (as listed in the bibliography) were sources of data for this article. The main question is, where are architectural studies in Greece in terms of the other changes proposed by the Bologna Declaration? Where do they stand compared to other European architectural schools which gather incoming students? What can or should be done to improve their image abroad and to attract students from other countries with all that this entails in terms of prestige, income, learning outcomes, strengthening in the international scene?

2. Studies of Architecture in EHEA

In the 49 countries participating in the EHEA, architecture studies are offered in more than 351 schools (Konstantinidou, 2023). The duration of 1st and 2nd cycle of architectural studies varies from 3+2 years to 6+n years (where n can be equal to 1, 2 or more years), with the main models being the 3+2 years proposed by the BP and the integrated master with 5 years of study.

Since in architecture professional rights are granted after more than 4 years of study (meaning that a 1st cycle degree of 3 years won't give access to the profession) in all the participating countries, graduate architects have to continue their studies in 2nd cycle, and they can do that in another institution or even country. What do they consider choosing the institution to continue their 2nd cycle studies? Which are their criteria and why some schools of architecture attract more incoming students to their 2nd cycle of studies than others? To answer these questions a research was carried out in the context of a doctoral thesis (Konstantinidou, 2023), based on two questionnaires: the Questionnaire 1 was sent to the schools of architecture in EHEA (sent to 351 and answered by 103 architectural schools from 32 countries) and the Questionnaire 2 was sent to students of the 2nd course of study (answered by 101 people from 22 countries). In the following Figure 1 we see the average value of each of the elements highlighted by the students of the 2nd cycle of architecture studies. Excellent equals to 5, and the study program received 4 to 5 from almost all people, highlighting the primary importance, study program has in choosing an institution for 2nd cycle studies, among many other criteria.

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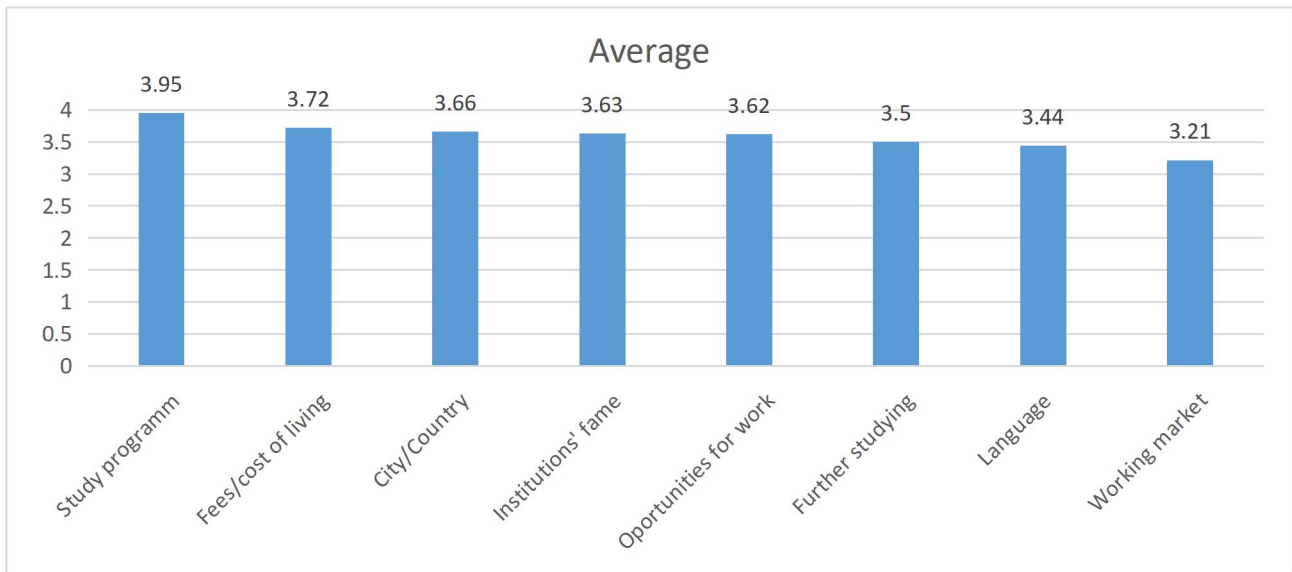
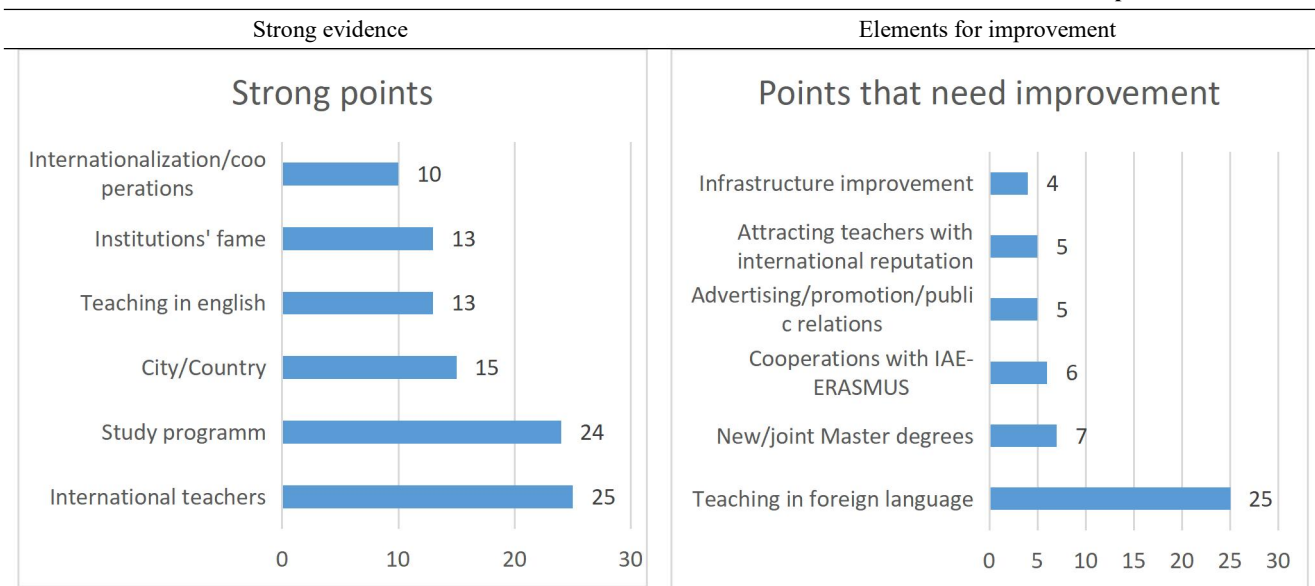


Figure 1 Main Criteria of the Student Population in the Selection of the 2nd Study Cycle.

Source: Konstantinidou, 2023

Accordingly, the heads of schools of architecture in Questionnaire 1 identified the following as positive elements and as possible reasons for attracting student population from other cities and countries: teachers with international experience and pedagogical training, the curriculum, the city in/near which the school is located, English as the language of instruction, the reputation of the school, its international collaborations. In the question about which elements, they consider to need improvement in terms of attracting a student population, they stated in order of ranking: the international language of instruction, development of new/common FPs, development of new partnerships, visibility and improvement of the faculty's reputation, attraction of teachers with international prestige, improvements in infrastructure (Table 2).

Table 2 Schools of Architecture Self-Evaluation in Terms of Positives and Elements That Need Improvement



Source: Konstantinidou, 2023.

Both students and schools of architecture pointed the city/country as an important factor when choosing school for 2nd cycle. Some cities with great architectural history and/or famous universities gather students from all over the world, gaining in many fields (financial, labor market, brain gain) from their presence (Konstantinidou Christodoulou, 2022).

Bearing in mind the data that emerged from the 2 questionnaires, let's examine the situation in the schools of architecture in Greece in relation to them, based on the data available from the certification reports.

3. Studies of Architecture in Greece

Architectural studies in Greece are offered in a single 5-year structure for the 1st and 2nd cycle of studies. Regarding quality assurance, all seven architectural schools have completed at least one accreditation of their undergraduate degree programs. Each school's recent accreditation report was searched for references to the elements identified in the above-mentioned survey, i.e., the curriculum, the quality of studies as reflected by the ratio of teaching/student population, the offer of doctoral studies and collaborations with other institutions (at least through Erasmus bilateral exchange agreements) (Table 3).

In relation to the proposals of the Bologna Declaration, the seven Greek schools of architecture fully comply with the granting of the diploma supplement and the use of ECTS, as they are decisions of the Ministry of Education with national application (Law 3374/2005). To promote mobility, all architectural schools participate in ERASMUS exchange programs for student and teaching population, with exchange agreements varying from 4 to 89 per school. The element of mobility is recorded in most of the accreditation reports. Doctorate-level studies (3rd cycle), an element that influenced the choice of school for continuing studies (Konstantinidou, 2023) are offered in all the examined schools with PhD candidates between 5 and 177 registered in each school.

Table 4 Details of Schools of Architecture in Greece (Ranked by Date of Accreditation Report)

School of Architecture (by Institution)	Accred. report date	Faculty member	Other teaching staff	Students	Declared student/teacher ratio *	Ph.D. candidates	Erasmus Bilateral agreements
University of Thessaly	5 Dec. '20	25	6	687	22	48	47
Democritus University of Thrace	27 Feb. '21	17	1	745	41	67	12
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki	10 April '21	24	4+1+19 = 24	1458	30	100	48
University of Ioannina	5 June '21	7	1+11+4 = 16	272	27	5	4
National Technical University of Athens	12 June '21	56	17	1844	27	177	89
University of Patras	25 Feb. '23	22	2+10+11 = 23	849	38	28	32
Polytechnic of Crete	7 May '23	24	18+4 = 22	1155	32	35	16
European Schools of Architecture		> 41	-	> 600	15-18	-	-

* for the calculation of the ratio, the sum of faculty members and other teaching staff is taken into account. As Other teaching staff are considered special teaching staff, staff in temporary contract, scholars that support teaching (*Source*: School certification reports 2020–2023, Konstantinidou, 2023).

In terms of quality assurance, all architectural schools comply with the relevant principles set by the institutions they belong to, collecting data and sending them to the central administration of their institution. They have certified at least ones in the previous year's their study program and have improved the former accreditation reports' data considerably. For the European dimension of education, all seven architectural schools encourage

collaborations at the teaching and research level and the mobility of both student and teaching population.

The accreditation report of each architectural school examines whether the curriculum meets the standard specifications and whether the learning outcomes of the graduates of a specific cycle correspond to the expected professional qualifications required by society and the labor market (Hellenic Authority for Higher Education 2021). The reports were structured on the model given by Hellenic Authority for Higher Education, examining the compatibility of each school with ten basic principles that cover the whole of their operation, with the aim of the best possible visibility to the world and focus on the student population and the offer of excellent learning experience. All Greek architectural schools are recorded to show full or substantial compliance with the key principles under review.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Comparing the data of the accreditation reports to the results of the research in schools of architecture in the EHEA, the architectural schools in Greece try to reach the goals set for the teaching staff, the curriculum, the internationalization. These can be a starting point for discussion in order to draw some first conclusions for the Greek architectural schools.

A common feature, although with significant differences between architectural schools, is the very high ratio of student to teaching population — in relation to the international standards of 15 students/teacher in design laboratories. Specifically, a ratio of 27 to 44 students/teacher was declared (with no common rule as to which faculty members count), an element that significantly (negatively) affects the quality of the learning experience. It is noted that for the calculation of the ratio all categories of teachers are taken into account (teachers, special teaching staff, special laboratory staff, short term teachers, scholarship holders, etc.). The extra effort on the part of the teaching staff to maintain a high quality of studies in each school is particularly emphasized in most of the architectural schools, an element that can develop into possible burnout, not many years ahead. Especially at schools of architecture in Athens, Thessaloniki and Volos, registrations from other peripheral schools significantly increase the number of students which enter through the conventional route of the nationwide exams. Another element that also affects the quality of studies is the teaching areas, i.e., classrooms, studios etc., and technological infrastructures, which are found to be in significant need of maintenance and renewal.

In terms of curricula, all schools offer architectural design studios at various scales, from the scale of the object to that of the city, and theoretical courses, which vary from 44 to 52 in total, to acquire the diploma. Only the school of architecture in Chania mentions its focus of studies in the Mediterranean region. As the profession of architect is included in the regulated professions, all architectural schools offer studies fully compatible with the 11 points of the EU Directive 2005/36/ EC and have a strong focus on design, while some of them explicitly state that compatibility.

Regarding internationalization, all architectural schools organize lectures by guest speakers from the professional field and the international architectural scene, and the teaching staff undertakes international collaborations in research and teaching. However, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the attractiveness of the schools for studies (undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral) by foreigners other than Erasmus students, a population for which data is not provided in the accreditation reports. None of the seven architectural schools offer studies in a language other than Greek, with the exception of some individual courses, and master studies which are offered to the student population after the completion of the 5-year studies, essentially as a 2nd Master.

Master studies are not mentioned in the examined accreditation reports, as master studies get accredited in another accreditation review.

All the schools offer proven high-level architectural studies, without, however, having the necessary financial and logistical support from the Greek state. They comply with international standards and follow the proposals of the Bologna Declaration when given strict instructions by the Ministry, while the newest directions are impossible to systematically identify in the certification reports (e.g., lifelong learning, accessibility, teaching innovation etc.). Greek architectural schools actively participate in European architectural education, going beyond their formal obligations and aiming to provide quality education, with their own strategy and differently formulated targets for learning outcomes.

The present paper provides a first framework for reflection on the European orientation of architectural studies in the context of the European Education Policy and the EHEA, for the assessment of the dynamics of architectural schools, while much more elements are necessary to be discussed upon an overall consideration of architectural studies in Greece, in relation to the European and international scene of higher education. Elements that largely remain unstated in the context of the accreditation reports, are often negotiable within schools and to some extent constitute their invisible characteristics.

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