

WOMEN AND EQUALITY IN ARCHITECTURE: AN ANGLO-FRENCH COMPARATIVE STUDY

Valerie Caven¹ and Marie Diop

Nottingham Business School, 7th floor Newton Building, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, NG1 4BU UK.

Architecture in the UK and France has very different sociological and cultural origins resulting in variances in how work is organised. Workplace roles of women also show marked distinctions in terms of equality. The aim of this paper is to examine the quest for equality in architecture for women in both countries reporting the findings of an Anglo-French comparative study in to architects' careers. In particular initiatives aiming to encourage more women in to the profession are explored with regard to their effectiveness. Using an interpretive and comparative approach within the qualitative paradigm, semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with a total of 48 women architects in the East Midlands (in the UK) and the Charente-Maritime (in France). All were asked about their careers in architecture, what had attracted them to the profession and their experiences of working in a male-dominated environment. Findings indicate surprising differences in levels of equality for women in the two countries and marked differences in women's experiences of working as an architect. Women have come to the profession in France much later than their British counterparts but are present in greater numbers and, on average, earn more than their male colleagues. The paper identifies and discusses the differences in working practices and identifies other factors which may help to explain this anomaly.

Keywords: architecture, equality, France, UK, women.

INTRODUCTION

The lack of equality for women in architecture is well-documented (Fowler and Wilson, 2004; De Graft-Johnson *et al.*, 2005) with much attention having been given to why women leave (De Graft-Johnson *et al.*, 2003; Adams and Tancred, 2000); the experiences of those, particularly women, in the profession (Sang *et al.*, 2007; Caven, 2004, 2006a, 2006b); the 'feminisation' of the profession and subsequent 'depreciation' of status (Chadoin, 2007; Lapeyre, 2004). Numerous campaigns and initiatives have been put in place in attempts to encourage more women into the profession. While these initiatives claim invariably claim success, the reality is that very little has changed. Despite a relatively rapid increase in the number of architectural students being female (now approximately 40%), only, 19% of qualified architects are women (RIBA, 2009) and this has showed little change, suggesting otherwise.

The position in France is that despite coming to the profession in numbers at a much later stage than their UK counterparts, there are significantly more qualified women in architecture than in the UK. There is approximately the same number of architects in each country representing the same proportion of the population; also, salaries are roughly equivalent however Chadoin (2007) highlights an interesting anomaly in that French women are much more likely to work in the public sector and thus enjoy a higher salary and greater job security than their male counterparts.

¹ valerie.caven@ntu.ac.uk

The intention of this research is to explore the position of women architects in both the UK and France in terms of equality (or otherwise). A comparative study is a useful means of examining how a particular phenomenon affects different groups - in this case women architects in the UK and France. As Winch and Campagnac (1995) point out, comparative studies are frequently used in sociological research but seldom in cross-national projects. In addition, Goodchild *et al.* (2010) argue that while the French experience has been largely overlooked in British research, it provides a useful means of comparing trends. The structure of the paper is that a review of literature follows relating to the origins of the profession and women's position in it; then we turn to the semi-structured in-depth interviews carried out in the qualitative paradigm with 48 female architects in France and the UK using a comparative method; next the findings of the research is discussed with coverage of some of the many initiatives and campaigns designed to encourage women into the profession and to promote their work. Finally, the contribution of this paper is outlined in the concluding section indicating that while the initiatives and campaigns have some degree of success in promoting equality there is still much to be done.

WOMEN AND THE ARCHITECTURE PROFESSION: BACKGROUND AND CURRENT POSITION

In this section we discuss the development of the architecture profession and the inception of the professional bodies; then we look at the entry of women to the profession in the UK and France with reference to the respective labour markets.

'Men of taste, men of science, men of honour' (T.L. Donaldson, Secretary of The Institute of Architects, 1834) - the formation of the profession and professional bodies

The sociological origins of the profession vary widely between the two countries. In France, the origins were from the arts only with architects conceptualising and creating buildings for royalty prior to the Revolution and is reflected in the creation of the professional body The Royal Academy of Architects founded in the 1670s (Marquet and de Montilbert, 1970). In the UK, architecture evolved from two distinct origins: from the arts and from the crafts with the Institute of British Architecture being created in 1834 (the Royal Charter was granted in 1837). The formation of a professional body in the UK was strongly resisted by the artists who felt it reduced their status (Symes, Eley and Seidel, 1995). The principle objectives of the IBA were to cultivate good relationships among architects, encourage good practice and provide technical information, however, Kaye (1960) refers to it as being little more than a 'gentleman's dining club'.

Royal protection for the RAA not surprisingly ceased during the French Revolution and in 1793 it became part of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris which was the sole provider of architectural education in France until, 1968 and the formation of the Schools of Architecture in regional universities. Architectural education in the UK was governed by the Architectural Association which was a breakaway group of the IBA formed in 1847 and for some time existed as a direct competitor of the IBA but whose role evolved to be that of educator. Originally surveyors were permitted to be members of the IBA but in 1835 the relationship was discontinued and the Institute set about creating 'closure' of the profession.

While the roles of the respective professional bodies are fundamentally similar in terms of protecting the title 'architect', providing codes of conduct or system of values

and maintaining standards of architectural education; there is an additional strand attached to the profession in France, that of the 'liberale' character of the profession. This is a fundamental aspect of the sociology of professions in France and is characterised by independence, the existence of confidence in the architect by the client and responsibility for the professional mode of delivery of the service (Marquart and De Montlibert, 1970). What this means, in effect, is that the role of the architect is seen as incompatible with that of entrepreneur, that "like the doctor or barrister, the architect must not 'seek' the client" (Marquart and De Montlibert, 1970:373) and this concept explains much about the structure of the profession in France today. The following section now discusses the entry of women to the profession.

'Keeping houses, not building them' (Headline New York Times Oct 31st, 2007) - the lack of women in architecture

Women were prevented from becoming members of professional bodies even if they had achieved the necessary educational requirements. Lehman cites the case of accountancy where "it was argued that as only the British upper classes entered the professions, and upper class British women never had to work, only women from the lower classes would enter the profession ... the entry of women from the poorer class would do two things: lower the status of the profession, and increase competition, thus lowering the remuneration for all" (Lehman, 1992:266). This is as much a gender issue as it is a class issue and reflects attempts by professions to gain market control and collective social mobility and, as a result, improve their position within society. Professions do this by attempting to restrict entry to a small group of eligible persons.

While in post-Revolution France, class may not have played such a marked role in the exclusion of women, even if women were admitted to universities they were not allowed to graduate. The first woman to graduate in France with a degree in law did so in 1890; however she was prohibited from practising as a lawyer until, 1900.

The poor assimilation of women into professions is explained by many feminist sociologists (see for example Crompton and Sanderson, 1990; Witz, 1992) as a result of men feeling threatened; traditionally there has been an emphasis on homogeneity within professions created by standardised skills and knowledge and, by implication, gender. However, Hakim (2000) argues the lack of women is a life-style preference and that true equality in some professions, especially those in the construction industry (Hakim, 2008), will never be attained as women make choices as to their involvement rather than being passive victims.

The first formal acknowledgement of women in the architecture profession was the awarding of an architectural diploma to Signe Hornborg from Finland in 1890 (Mattogno, undated). Prior to this, women were originally involved in an amateur philanthropic role (Walker, 1989). Designing social housing for estate workers was seen as a suitable past-time for an upper class lady in the UK but as the construction process moved away from its craft origins and became industrialised, it was considered to have developed into a 'masculine' profession. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the most a woman was allowed to do was to trace plans and write specifications. This did at least allow some form of personal and financial independence but the work was of very low prestige and mundane. At the time it was seen as making use of women's natural skills in that it was demanding and required high attention to detail (Walker, 1989).

The relevance of class as a means of social closure was reinforced in architecture by the fact that working class women were already involved in the building industry in

making nails and bricks. As Walker reports “the class bias of the nineteenth century debates ignored the plight of working-class women in the building industry and produced a myopic view of women’s capabilities and their potential as architects, blocking women from full participation in the profession, limiting them to decorative or auxiliary tasks” (Walker, 1989:95). As well as using class as a means of exclusion, patriarchy was also very much in evidence. The women who worked in architecture practices were frequently restricted to drawing board work because of supposed difficulties they would encounter in the inspection of buildings on site. Even within the office environment there existed what Walker refers to as ‘a system of architectural apartheid’ with men and women being located in separate rooms. This was carried out in the name of chivalry but restricted women to the lower positions in the profession.

Melvin (1997) reports that the formation of the RIBA did nothing to help the position of women architects because it simply reinforced and entrenched the inequalities which were present. Women experienced particular difficulties in the post-war period, in spite of the fact that during war-time they had been actively invited to take up architecture. Afterwards they were 'encouraged' to return to the home in their role as wives and carers in order to make way for the large numbers of soldiers returning home and requiring employment. The women who were already established within the profession, for example Elizabeth Scott and Jane Drew, had gained the acceptance of the male establishment but appeared reluctant to promote the endorsement of women within the profession.

Women from progressive families in France had been educated at l'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris which until, 1968 was the only institution in France allowed to offer architectural qualifications, however French law prohibited them from taking up employment on completion of their studies. Neither did French women architects benefit from the post-War building boom in France as so few were actually working in the profession. The inclusion of women in to the profession in France initially happened at a much slower rate than in the UK. In, 1960, only 0.8% of those enrolled in the College of architects were women although this rose rapidly to 15% in, 1977 following the 'Malraux' reforms of, 1968, reaching 43% by, 1993 (Chadoin, 2007) overtaking the UK where still only has around 39% of architectural students are female (RIBA, 2010).

Those women 'pioneers' in the profession were highly visible however there is little evidence that any perceived themselves as a role model, indeed there is more evidence that they did not identify with the feminist movement in either country. McLeod (2004:2) cites the case of Charlotte Perriand who worked with Corbusier during the, 1920s and 30s saying "Perriand did not wish to perceive herself first and foremost as a woman designer, nor did she particularly identify with the feminist movement in France, thus complicating efforts to cast her as a 'role model' for contemporary women designers". McLeod goes on to say that there was a tendency (particularly during the, 1970s and 80s) to perceive women designers as victims and that Perriand considered "herself the equal of the male employees, but she also enjoyed their warmth, camaraderie and respect" (McLeod, 2004:2). Likewise, in the UK during the mid twentieth century Elizabeth Scott and Jane Drew were very visible in the profession but neither appears to have furthered the careers of other women preferring instead to be remembered for their designs.

Little has changed in recent years with Whitman (2005) pointing out that virtually no progress has been made over the last, 20 years. The profession remains heavily male-dominated with a high drop out of women prior to qualification (De Graft-Johnson et al, 2003; Chadoin, 2007). The 'macho' culture of construction is held to be a major contributor along with long working hours and poor remuneration. However, in Whitman's (2005) study she found that it was women themselves who were restricted their own career development preferring to sacrifice career progression in order to achieve 'balance' in their lives which provides an interesting alternative perspective. Over the years, there have been many initiatives and campaigns designed to raise awareness of the attractions of the profession for women and to attempt to encourage them to become an architect. Hence this leads us to the central question of this research which is to examine whether there are differences in levels of equality for women architects in the UK and France. We now turn to discuss the methods used in the research.

METHOD

Comparative studies (particularly using inductive methods) are relatively rare in cross-national research (Winch and Campagnac, 1995). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with 48 women architects in the UK and France using a career life history approach in the qualitative paradigm. Names were selected at random from the RIBA Register of Members (East Midlands region) and from L'Ordre des Architectes (Poitou Charentes region). Both regions provide a variety of contexts for architecture from urban and rural locations, public and private sector projects and a growing interest in conservation in both regions. The UK women were interviewed in person but the French women were interviewed using Skype and CallBurner software by one of the authors who is a native French speaker.

Our initial concerns that telephone interviews might not produce such rich data as those carried out in person were soon alleviated. While the telephone interviews were much shorter, we felt the richness and depth of the data was comparable and concur with Irvine (2010:5) that "more data isn't necessarily better data"

All the women were asked about what had initially attracted them to the profession. their experiences of studying and then how their careers had developed following qualification; further questions covered the rewards and satisfaction; pressures and stresses of a career in architecture. All interviews were recorded (with the permission of the respondents) and transcribed prior to analysis. Thematic analysis of the data was carried out identifying the key issues relating to the careers of women architects.

WOMEN AND EQUALITY IN ARCHITECTURE

Here we move on to discuss and analyse the findings from the interviews, however we shall first consider a selection of some of the initiatives which have been introduced over the years with the aim of encouraging more women into architecture and to support and promote those women in the profession. This will help provide a context for the empirical data and discussion which follows.

Union Internationale des Femmes Architectes

The largest and most longstanding initiative/organisation to represent women in architecture is the Union Internationale des Femmes Architectes (UIFA), founded in France during 1964 by Solange de la Tour after she had been told by a mayor not to

submit drawings for a competition as the profession was reserved "for the masculine sex having accomplished their military service" (www.UIFA.fr, 2011). UIFA aims to:

- Publicise and promote the woman architect
- Build relationships and promote exchanges among women whose professions are related to construction and quality of life
- Gather information about professional lives for these women worldwide
- Strengthen the friendships and links between all members without political, racial or religious discrimination
- Be their spokesperson to those in economic and social authority, as well as those who form public opinion to better define their role and responsibility in everyday life.

There are currently, 2000 members in 80 countries worldwide with, 200 in France (Source: www.UIFA.fr). International congresses are held every two or three years with the aim of improving architectural education; the most recent held in Seoul, South Korea in October, 2010 had the theme 'Environmental Architecture'.

Women in Architecture group

This group was established in, 1999 from the Women's Architecture Group which was formed in, 1985. The group aims to provide opportunities for women to meet and discuss their experiences and to lobby for better conditions and opportunities as well as to raise the profile of women in the profession, provide 'taster' days for schoolgirls to show them what is involved in being an architect. It is now part of the Architects for Change initiative set up by the RIBA to cover all diversity issues.

DiverseCity 50:50 Charter

This was initiated by Building Design trade journal to increase the number of women in architecture. They investigated the high drop out rate from the profession as 37% of architectural students were female but only 14% of qualified architects and found that women left not because they did not like the profession but because it was too difficult to combine the career with a family. The aims of the campaign were to:

- Recruit, promote and allocate work according to ability and experience alone
- Set out maternity and paternity rights in a written contract and to strive to go beyond the statutory minimum
- Offer flexible working to all employees and retraining for returning parents
- Challenge long hours and monitor working time
- Appoint a practice champion to promote and monitor the charter

250 architectural practices signed up for the charter, it was declared a success and the campaign finished.

'Chicks with Bricks: a Celebration of Women in the Built Environment'

Chicks with Bricks was founded in, 2005 as 'a celebration of women in the built environment'. The group provided networking opportunities but has since been subsumed in to the People in Space network.

Who's the hottest female architect??? (Thread on Archinect Discussion Forum started Feb, 2006) - the battle for credibility

This thread referring to who was the most attractive female architect on a discussion forum for architects in the United States (Archinect) began on 2nd June, 2006 and ran for five months attracting 65 comments some with photos attached of colleagues. Obviously, it is difficult to tell the gender of the contributors as they have the benefit of anonymity from their usernames but some do appear to be women. What was surprising was that no one commented on the 'appropriateness' of the discussion at all.

Archinect, itself, was formed in, 1997 with the aims of:

Mission: The goal of Archinect is to make architecture more connected and open-minded, and bring together designers from around the world to introduce new ideas from all disciplines.

Background: Archinect was initially developed in 1997 by Paul Petrunia. The site has since become a top online destination for progressive-design oriented students, architects, educators, and fans.

(Source: www.archinect.com accessed 13th April, 2011)

Equality and Architects in the UK and France

The discussion will now turn to the empirical data and the experiences of the 48 respondents. While the women were not specifically asked about their perceptions of equality as such, we did ask about their experience of being a woman in the male-dominated environment of construction. It was a question many of them had anticipated with answers like "I knew you were going to ask that ...!" Overall, the responses were surprising as to the extent the women rejected feminism despite some of the older interviewees having been 'pioneers' of women in the profession. Overwhelmingly the women were adamant they did not have a strong feminist agenda and one who had worked for a feminist cooperative early in her career left because the:

"organisation was set up very specifically about women in architecture, you couldn't help but address the problems all the time, they were coming to you with the issue all the time, they were expecting you to have a view ... so in a way it's quite nice being able to say to myself there's no pressure on me to be the archetypal wonderful woman"

Many responded with comments like "I'm not one for burning your bra anyway" and the prevailing attitude was one of 'getting on with the job' rather than addressing issues of the poor position of women in the profession. Site visits were not seen as being of concern although many mentioned that they knew of other women who refused to work on sites. Where site work was mentioned it was through interviewees stressing that they did not adapt their clothing other than to make sure they were wearing shoes appropriate for a construction site. One was particularly adamant, speaking directly into the recording device:

I've never worn a trouser suit I would like you to add! I've worn trousers occasionally and my mother keeps saying 'what you want is a nice trouser suit' but I say 'that is not what I want, ever!' because I think that is trying to be them, you've got to be yourself. I never wear anything but trousers at home but that is a statement I make and if I go up a ladder I make sure I go last

On the whole site work was considered rewarding through being able to see a design become transformed into a building and the stereotypical construction worker was largely considered to be a tabloid invention. Comments about site workers highlighted courtesy and respect rather than wolf-whistling or calling out. Perhaps, more

disturbingly where the women complained of harassment, bullying and unequal treatment it was in their own firms by their male colleagues. Due to the differences in the way architectural work is organised between the UK and France, it was reported in a much greater sense by the women in the East Midlands. Perhaps, this can be partly explained by the fact that most architects work in practices and other organisations in the UK whereas in France the dominant mode of operating is as a 'liberale' - practising independently. We heard stories of employers (the same name being mentioned by several different women) who deliberately employed women but refused to promote them and generally treated them very badly. Then there were the male colleagues who refused to acknowledge their female associates or who made unwanted sexual advances to them.

Other exclusionary tactics included talking about football during meetings or in the case of one woman who took a male student to a client meeting with her; despite him being 30 years her junior and the fact that she was the practice principal; the client addressed all the questions to the junior. Another who was a keen golfer mentioned she was never invited to any of the golfing days that her male colleagues attended regardless of playing at an equal level to them. The French respondents did not mention feeling excluded or discriminated against but highlighted that at the start of their careers, they were regarded with curiosity, but once they became known they felt respected through their work and (ultimately) seniority. Again this illustrates the differences between the structure of the profession between the two countries with the French practising as 'liberales' and thus using their own names whereas the British tend to be employed in practices consequently being more anonymous.

None of our respondents had joined any of the groups or initiatives designed to promote the role of women in the profession. While they were aware of them, they cited time and workload issues as being the key reason. The majority of the UK architects spoke of their professional body in disparaging terms saying it was out of touch, that it was costly to be a member in return for little support and generally it did not represent their interests. In contrast, the French architects spoke of L'Ordre des Architectes as being a useful and valuable source of information and support with one saying that the Ordre "has a very good website for young people setting up their businesses with types of contracts ..."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The picture painted of an architectural career is that the profession and construction industry provide an interesting and challenging environment for a woman, however the challenges are not insurmountable. Granted, in contrast to the work of De Graft-Johnson *et al.* (2003) and Adams and Tancred (2000), we were dealing with those who had remained in the profession and who represent 'survivors'. As such their accounts will reflect this. However, it is telling that where discrimination is reported it is by fellow professionals and employers - those which are subject to employment legislation. Certainly the existence of forum discussion threads on who is the 'hottest' women architect indicates that there remains a significant problem with male professionals. The UK women reported a greater number of problems with male colleagues and employers than their French counterparts, we heard of certain employers whose names were mentioned by several women as being particularly sexist and of colleagues adopting a variety of exclusionary tactics. In contrast, the French women told of a more inclusive mode of working where they felt valued for their skills and ultimately seniority. Neither UK nor French women reported any

problems with site workers although these are likely to be bound by codes of conduct (as well as power relations coming into play) prohibiting them from making comments but no one mentioned being made to feel uncomfortable even though a woman on a construction site is still quite a rarity and thus, much more visible.

It is significant to note that although French women came to the profession much later than their British contemporaries, they are present in higher numbers and enjoy a much more positive experience which leads us to question the effectiveness of initiatives to encourage women to enter and remain in the profession which appear to be limited in their efficacy. Certainly those in the UK are characterised by their transient nature but also by demeaning titles and a strong emphasis on the use of pink type and graphics coupled with a general reluctance among the respondents to become involved with these campaigns. We suggest this is for fear of being seen as feminist and side-lined by male employers and colleagues thus damaging their career prospects with the women instead opting to attempt a peaceful co-existence. There are significant differences between the relative successes and longevity of these groups and campaigns. Some appear to have been established on a whim but others show a more serious intent. Aside from the UIFA, it is difficult to find up to date information about events and initiatives as well as joining and membership information.

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