

# Initiatives of built environment education and the popularisation of architecture in Poland

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## Abstract

Whilst Poland has remarkably valuable experience in promoting the idea of built environment education (BEE), there is an unfortunate and sizable deficiency with regard to the national coordination of architectural policy. The objective of this research was to investigate the extent to which these valuable educational activities influence social interest in architecture and whether they could have an impact upon students' choice of university major. To this end, a survey of 215 current students of architecture in Poland was performed. The research outcome was very interesting. Inter alia, it revealed the fact that despite the substantive quality of several educational initiatives, their range was unfortunately very limited. The majority of interviewed architecture students stated that they did not know of any all-Polish architectural education programme and that during their obligatory education, they had not participated in any architectural workshops.

**Keywords:** built environment education (BEE), architectural education for all, spatial education

## 1. Introduction

The public discourse of the past few years has seen the progressive occurrence of the postulate of immediate educational reform. This is understandable as the current educational system is still dominated by the educational paradigm stemming from the nineteenth century concept of memorising facts and passively following teachers' instructions. The development of civilisation with regard to the proliferation of information technology requires resolute action towards changing the dominant approaches to teaching. Considering published expert reports, there is a gradually increasing demand for interpersonal skills, the ability to analyse data and information, and unconventional and creative thinking (Fazlagić, 2018). Changes to the present didactic method must also lead to a situation in which learning outweighs teaching. It is a process which should cover the entire human life cycle.

The report commissioned by the Minister of Enterprise and Technology entitled: *School for innovator. Shaping pro-innovative competences*, criticises methods used in the Polish education system. The main objection to the education system is that it promotes and perpetuates students' non-innovative competences (Fazlagić, 2018). This constructive criticism of the Polish compulsory education system should finally become a strong argument for the immediate transformation of this sector, which must be prepared for the progressive appearance of non-standard problems and new circumstances. As the further development of the Polish economy needs to be built on knowledge, both teachers and students need to learn how to be creative, persistent, and how to resolve problems, face risks and be able to cooperate in project teams.

Architectural education is useful in finding appropriate pedagogy methods. It is one of most appreciated methods of teaching in countries like Finland and Denmark. The most meaningful association with the term 'architectural education' in common knowledge concerns professional education in the scope of architecture. To differentiate this from the architectural education which is available not only to a circumscribed body of professionals, the term 'common architectural education' is used in the Polish language. This term is semantically less ambiguous; therefore, access to it is more egalitarian – attainable for everyone regardless of their age, views, profession or areas of interest. In Poland, the terms 'environmental education' and 'spatial education' are occasionally used. The term 'architectural education' is orientated towards everybody and concerns the totality of the constructed environment and also its relationship with the natural environment; in English literature, the equivalent term is 'built environment education (BEE)'. A term which has been becoming increasingly popular around the world is 'Baukultur' – it derives from German and means studies of the culture of constructing.

The teaching of architecture shapes spatial sensitivity, the ability to cooperate, empathy, and also skills related to expressing and explaining one's own opinions. It integrates knowledge of many different subjects and responds to the need of discovery and creation (Haupt, 2018; Jagiełło-Kowalczyk, Żabicka, Avsec, 2019). Moreover, it develops high order thinking skills, which combine critical thinking with creativity. Architectural education is one of the best project education methods in which the final effect refers to an existing spatial solution. It has particular importance for the youngest generation, who learn responsibility for the immediate environment (Jagiełło-Kowalczyk, Żabicka, Avsec, 2019).

The methodology for teaching about architecture and the environment is not merely an inspiration for searching for methods or new forms of modern pedagogy. In the current state of the world, the process of the spatial development of the human environment requires considering diverse aspects. It is not only concerned with functionality and aesthetics but also the quality, accessibility, and rationality of spatial organisation, as well as biodiversity and the protection of natural resources, especially water and sources of energy. Józef Rykwert (2004) claimed that cities are not organised by some undefined factors,

but by their populations. He believes that people should act and transform their neighbourhood to make it more friendly, safe and healthy. Surroundings that lack these features constitute a threat for the development of civilisation. Thus, no matter how clichéd it sounds, society must be educated and sensitised, and taught responsibility for their environment. In short, it must be said that architectural education, also called 'spatial education' or 'built environment education' (BEE), unites all substantial elements of social education corresponding to the cultural needs of the twenty-first century. Moreover, architectural education remains one of the key elements in shaping architectural policies and urban development strategies in countries maintaining a high standard of building culture.

Over the past 20 years, several architectural education programmes have been introduced in Poland. They have supported creativity, critical thinking, and sensitivity to spatial and ecological problems. The characteristics and objectives of these programmes were of a diverse nature. Their creators were aware of the fact that architecture built in line with respect for the people and the world has the potential to be. Therefore, from the very beginning of architectural education in Poland, attempts have been made for the public and systemic promotion of architecture (Wantuch-Matla, Martyka, 2020). Despite several efforts aimed at including architecture in the Polish education system, there has been a considerable lack of promotion of architectural knowledge and culture in the country. There is also poor social awareness of the fact that an architecturally uneducated society is an effect of the weakness of its condition (Maciejczak-Kwiatkowska, Retko-Bernatowicz, Wiśniewski, 2018). Additionally, there is a shortage of research focused on the rationalisation and assessment of architecture, the recording and preservation of works of Polish architects and developers, and the public presentation of these works. It is sad that the culture of spatial development has never been an influencing factor of social attitudes and actions. The main reason for this situation is a lack of awareness among politicians of architecture as a bonding element in social, cultural and economic life.

In this context, an interesting question is whether Polish achievements in the aspect of architectural education for all has brought measurable positive effects to society. One of these effects may be the stimulation of interest in architecture resulting in the decision of students to choose this subject as university major. It was assumed that present students of architecture had been fascinated with the subject during the period of compulsory education, at classes realised within the national curriculum or at non-obligatory architecture workshops. Young people who decided to take an enrolment exam in architectural drawing had most likely intensely worked prior to the exam. They had probably been strongly motivated by an interest in architecture and urban development in the first place. The survey presented in this paper was directed towards architecture students. Although, it may suggest that the research concerned the education of future engineers (Avsec, Ferk Savec, 2019; Avsec, Jagiello-Kowalczyk, Markiewicz, 2018), the main objective of this project was to try to assess the scope of influence of educational initiatives in the aspect of the popularisation of architectural knowledge.

Issues relating to built environment education, especially for children, are rather widely represented in literature on the subject. Among the most recent publications in English discussing the methods of teaching children about the environment, *Placemaking with children and youth: participatory practices for planning sustainable communities* deserves mention (Derr, Chawla, Mintzer, 2018). Much of the useful information regarding methods of the engagement of children in real urban designs may be found in *Designing cities with children and young people. Beyond playgrounds and skate parks* (Bishop, Corkery, 2017). In Poland, the issues of spatial education for the non-professional reader, including children, are compiled and analysed in two publications: *Powszechna edukacja architektoniczna. Ewolucja idei i doświadczenia zagraniczne* (Common architectural education. Evolution of ideas and experience for abroad) (Wantuch-Matla, Martyka, 2020), focuses on the general situation in European

countries. *Powszechna edukacja architektoniczna. Doświadczenia polskie i kształcenie incydentalne* (Common architectural education. Polish experience and incidental education) consists of the presentation of experience, diagnosis and challenges of common architectural education in Poland (Wantuch-Matla, Martyka, Ruchlewicz-Dzianach, 2020). Issues of initiatives of architectural education are present in the report from research commissioned by Narodowe Centrum Kultury (National Centre for Culture), entitled *W dialogu z otoczeniem? Społeczne postrzeganie przestrzeni publicznej i architektury w Polsce* (In dialogue with surrounding? Social reception of public space and architecture in Poland) (Maciejczak-Kwiatkowska, Retko-Bernatowicz, Wiśniewski, 2018). It is apparent that the level of social interest in the quality and changes to public space is sufficient, but the level of general knowledge with regard to architecture and urban development is very low. However, there is no research exploring the scope of influence and effects of implemented educational initiatives with regard to built environment education in Poland.

## 2. Summary of the achievements of built environment education, architectural education for all and spatial education in Poland

One of the most prominent architectural educators in Poland was Wiktor Zin. For nearly thirty years from the early nineteen sixties, his TV programme *Piórkiem i węglem* (By Quill Pen and Charcoal) was broadcasted on the only available public TV channel. It was the time when Poland was not a sovereign country politically or economically. The series hosted by this charismatic scholar promoted the beauty of Polish historic buildings and local architecture in difficult times of real socialism. Looking back, one must admit that no other initiative, up until recent times, had reached such popularity.

The pioneer of architectural education for children in Poland, in the form of workshops, was Anna Palej. In cooperation with Jack Brown and Nigel Frost of RIBA General Education Group, she organised workshops for kids at the Third Biennale of Architecture in Kraków in 1989. Later, in the nineteen-nineties, Anna Palej and Grażyna Schneider-Skalska popularised the concept of environmental education and the British *Architecture in Schools* movement. Schneider-Skalska also formulated an experimental high school curriculum for the subject of architecture and environment, which was tested in one of the high schools in Kraków in the years 1992–1999 (Schneider-Skalska, 2016). To some extent, the activity of both women caught the attention of government authorities; The Ministry of National Education commissioned a report on the possibility of including architecture as a compulsory subject in school curricula. Unfortunately, due to the fact at that time Poland was preoccupied with organising its democratic structures and the economy after gaining the independence, the plans for architectural policy and, moreover, for architectural education were postponed.

Another interesting initiative in the aspect of raising social awareness regarding spatial relations undertaken at the end of the nineteen-nineties was the educational programme entitled *Ład przestrzenny, architektura, tradycje kulturowe* (Spatial order, architecture, cultural traditions), created by Zofia Bisiak, an art historian and cultural activity organizer, in Centrum Animacji Kultury (Cultural Activity Centre). The popularisation of architectural knowledge and the raising of social awareness concerning spatial relations were the main objectives of the programme. Together with final manifesto of the programme, entitled *Karta Drahimska* (Charter of Drahim), it became a milestone for further educational campaigns such as *Dialog z otoczeniem* (Dialogue with surrounding). Zofia Bisiak is credited with substantive preparation of numerous initiatives and national-level programmes realised by cultural institutions until recently (Wantuch-Matla, Martyka, Ruchlewicz-Dzianach, 2020).

The above-mentioned programme *Dialog z otoczeniem* (Dialogue with surrounding), completed in 2005, had the best chance to become a part of the education system. Its extended substantive content was prepared with special attention being paid to the use of a procedure of the Ministry of National Education enabling the implementation of the programme into the contemporary interdisciplinary classes in secondary schools. The contents of the programme consisted not only of architectural and spatial design topics, but also topics on environmental protection and balanced development. Additionally, the programme supported the notion of combining theory and practice, realised in the form of an architectural concept project. For a few years, the programme *Dialog z otoczeniem* was present at schools within the framework of interdisciplinary classes *Edukacja Regionalna – dziedzictwo kulturowe w regionie* (Regional Education – local cultural heritage) (Bisiak, Śmiechowski, Wróbel, 2005). Sadly, in spite of the excellent idea of interdisciplinary classes, which were the opportunity to bring architecture to schools, they have never been approved by the Ministry of National Education.

In 2012, the Chamber of Polish Architects (IARP) made another attempt to include the subject of architecture in the education system, but unfortunately, it also failed. The members of IARP obtained permission from the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland for the translation and adaptation of the Shaping Space educational programme to Polish conditions. As a result, the Polish version of the programme, entitled *Kształtowanie przestrzeni* (Shaping Space), was realised in secondary education schools from 2013 as interdisciplinary classes. Teachers implementing the programme in their schools praised it for variety and for the possibility of working with students using innovative methods, which proved attractive for both students and teachers (Marczak, 2017). However, after an enthusiastic reception, the impact of the programme realisation slowed down. The main reason for this was not only the lack of promotion and funds but also because there was too little substantive support for teachers, who were gradually becoming overloaded with additional duties. A good sign was the fact that in 2018, IARP commenced intensive works on making the programme more attractive and clear, and also took steps at a ministerial level to adapt it to all types of schools.

In 2016, a new programme called *Archi-Przygody* (Archi-Adventures) was launched. It is promoted by the National Centre for Culture (NCK) in primary schools, nurseries, and cultural institutions. The program seems to be more expansive in promoting architectural education than *Kształtowanie przestrzeni*. It was created by Zofia Bisiak, Anna Stępniewska, Dariusz Śmiechowski, Joanna Zwolińska, and Aleksandra Chrzanowska. The gradual increase of the popularity of the programme should be credited to the long-term experience of the creators in architectural education. The programme is realised annually in two editions – in spring and in autumn. The number of participating institutions is on the rise and the range of the programme is expanding. Each edition begins with professional training for teachers and is concluded with an assessment workshop in which teachers, architects and volunteers may share their opinion on the programme. It is clearly designed and accessible for both educators and pupils. It is also easy to implement due to its well-constructed didactic materials and superior coordination by the Department of Cultural Projects of NCK.

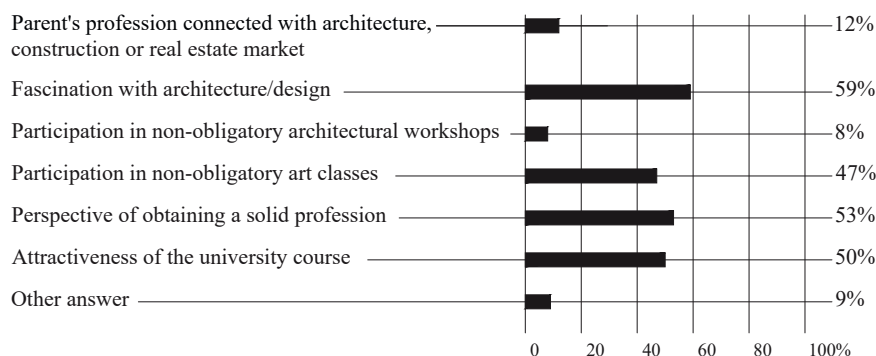
For many years, architects thrived to establish a national institution which could coordinate issues relating to the built environment and promote architecture. As early as 2009, the Secretary General of the Association of Polish Architects (SARP), Dariusz Śmiechowski, proposed detailed guidelines for creating the Polish Architectural Institute. It must be stressed that he also developed a strategy for the implementation of built environment education, in the form of a programme entitled *Architektura Plus* (Architecture Plus) (Śmiechowski, 2009). At the end of 2017, the long-awaited National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning (NIAiU) was founded which brought hope for systemic and coordinated architectural design and spatial development in Poland. Since its very beginning, this state institution undertook actions for the

systemic implementation of architectural and urban education. The institute organised its first congress on common architectural education in Tuczno. At present, the institution is engaged in a strategic approach to the popularisation of architectural knowledge for the benefit of society. At the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 the Institute returned to cooperation between Poland and The International Union of Architects (UiA) Built Environment Education Architecture & Children. It also coordinated the first edition of the famous international contest, the Golden Cubes Awards.

### 3. Research Description

The research was performed by a method of quantitative data collection (Babbie, 2004). The objective was to gather possibly the greatest amount of information on architectural awareness among children and teenagers. The survey was in an on-line form (Google Forms) was sent out by a group of teachers and scholars, and the editors of *Architektura & Biznes* (Architecture & Business) magazine between 6<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2020. The survey was also accessible in the public domain via social media. Respondents chosen for the survey were architecture students, ergo, in comparison to their peers studying at other faculties, they possessed spatial imagination, skills in design, and architectural knowledge (Avsec, Ferik Savec, 2019; Avsec, Jagiello-Kowalczyk, Markiewicz, 2018; Schneider-Skalska, 2018). As mentioned in the introduction, the academic education of the respondents was not the subject of the study as much as their experience with educational initiatives from childhood to the moment of entering university.

The survey was sent to students of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree courses on the major of architecture in most of the eminent universities in Poland. As the respondents were people born between approximately 1996 and 2000, they could have had contact with various educational initiatives realised between 2005 and 2019. This period approximately refers to the time in the lives of respondents between starting primary education and graduating from high school. In the period between 6<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2020, 215 completed survey forms were obtained. The form consisted of fourteen questions, a few of which were demographic questions. Approximately 80% of those surveyed were women, and 20% were men. Most of the respondents came from large cities (approx. 31%) and medium-sized cities (approx. 33%). Other groups were people from rural regions (approx. 26%) and small towns (approx. 9%). For the question: “At which point in your education did your interest in architecture and design begin?” most of the respondents answered “secondary school or high school” (over 66%). Other answers were “in years 1–3” (approx. 9%), “in years 4–6” (approx. 15%), and “at nursery school” (approx. 7%). For the question: “What was your strongest motivation for choosing architectural studies?” more than half of the respondents chose the answer “fascination with architecture and design” (approx. 59%). Other answers were: “perspective of obtaining a solid profession” (approx. 53%), “attractiveness of the

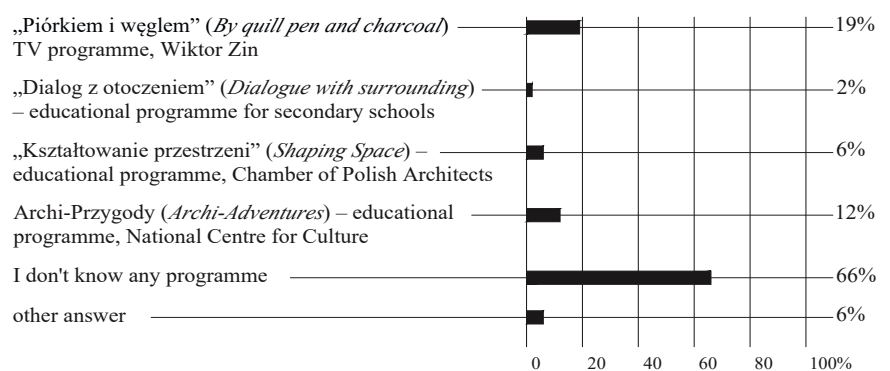


**Fig. 1.** Motivations of students for choosing architectural studies. The total sum of percentage figures is not equal to 100, as there was an option of ticking more than one answer (by author)

university course” (approx. 50%). Almost half of the respondents (approx. 47%) declared that the choice of architecture as the subject of study was influenced by the participation in non-obligatory art classes in the past. Unfortunately, a mere 8% of respondents confirmed their attendance to non-obligatory architectural workshops, as shown in Fig. 1.

A clear majority of present architecture students who took part in the survey (66%) did not report knowing any architectural education programme, a fact is both particularly surprising and sad. Only 19% of the participants reported being familiar with the oldest initiative – the broadcasted TV programme *Piórkem i węglem* (By Quill Pen and Charcoal). The most recent programme *Archi-Przygody* (Archi-Adventures) was known to only 12% of respondents. The programmes *Kształtowanie przestrzeni* (Shaping Space) and *Dialog z otoczeniem* (Dialogue with surrounding) were known to 6% and 2% of respondents, respectively; as shown in Fig. 2.

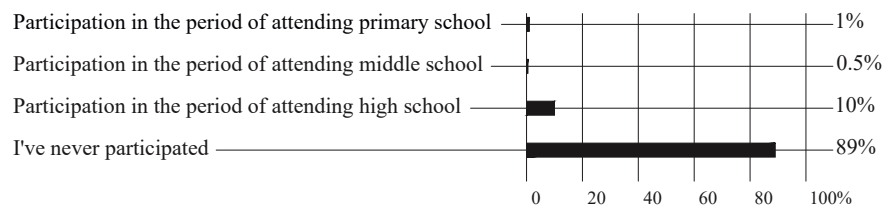
**Fig. 2.** Familiarity of architecture students with national-level programmes of architectural education. The total sum of percentage figures is not equal to 100 as there was the option to tick more than one answer (by author)



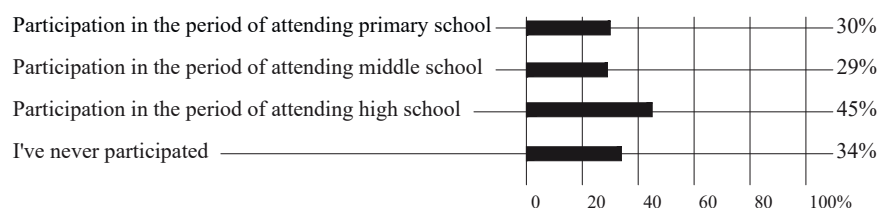
For the question: “Did your compulsory education consist of any architectural elements?” more than half of the respondents chose the answer “architectural elements were present in high school” (approx. 52%). Other answers were: “architectural elements were present in middle school” (approx. 37%) and “architectural elements were present in primary school” (approx. 20%). Almost 30% of respondents declared that architectural knowledge did not appear at any stage of their compulsory education.

A very clear majority of respondents have never participated in non-obligatory architectural workshops (89%), while only 10% participated in such classes. Considering the answers, the nature of the workshops was irregular and they were part of architectural drawing classes, directly preparing students for university enrolment, as shown in Fig. 3. By contrast, most of the students took part in non-obligatory art classes: approx. 30% in primary school, approx. 29% in middle school, and 45% in high school. Usually, such classes took place in cultural institutions, museums and school art clubs, as shown in Fig. 4.

**Fig. 3.** Participation of architecture students in non-obligatory architectural workshops. The total sum of percentage figures is not equal to 100 as there was then option to tick more than one answer (by author)



**Fig. 4.** Participation of architecture students in non-obligatory art classes. The total sum of percentage figures is not equal to 100 as there was the option to tick more than one answer (by author)



For the question: “What was your source of knowledge about architecture?”, the most popular answers were “web sites” and “books”, then “social media”, “blogs”, and “You Tube”. Sadly, more than 25% of students declared that they were rather uninterested in obtaining architectural knowledge. Approximately 44% of respondents declared an intention to complete didactic training, qualifying them to run architectural workshops for kids, and almost 27% of them did not exclude that option in the future.

#### 4. Conclusion

The outcome of the research may be disappointing. It was expected that architecture students had experienced contact with architectural issues during the period of compulsory education and should have been exposed to architecture much more often. Considering the survey results, one may generally claim that the initiatives and activities of architectural education definitely have a limited effect. The research confirmed that despite numerous actions, the development of interest in architecture through various forms of education still remains a niche activity among architecture students and professional architects alike. A considerable majority of respondents did not participate in – and did not even have any contact with – regular architectural classes or workshops in Poland. Even present students attended regular architectural workshops very rarely. The workshops they took part in were usually irregular classes that were part of pre-university courses. The knowledge of respondents on existing national-level educational programmes is also poor. Partly, it is understandable that respondents are not interested in common architectural education, as some of them do not bother improving their architectural knowledge at all.

Nevertheless, there is a completely different situation with regard to experience in non-obligatory art classes. Almost half of the respondents declared that art classes inspired them to be creative and explore design. Often, the classes were the turning point in the formation of their passions and interests that finally lead to them choosing the subject of study. This is good example proving that if a subject is included in the system of compulsory education, it influences the development of creative activity more effectively. Moreover, cultural education in Poland is coordinated to a high substantive standard by almost every cultural institution, on both the local and national level. It must be said that there are elements of architecture, ecology and environmental studies within the frame of cultural education, though they remain out of the mainstream activities of these institutions. It is not the objective of this paper to analyse the scope of cultural education in Poland. However, long-term experience of this sector and its good practice may be useful in the implementation of common architectural education.

The poor quality of the built environment is caused by a low standard of spatial and social culture of both the population and the people in power. Other relevant factors are the disintegration of social bonds and a lack of communal responsibility for the environment. In comparison to other European countries, Poland reveals underdevelopment in spatial management. For a long time, academic and professional circles have claimed that it is necessary to make people realise that the space is not only a public weal, but also a limited resource. Fortunately, since 2017, the architectural policy in Poland has been coordinated by the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning. One may expect that, through substantive and institutional measures, this new institution will implement systematic solutions not only in the field of architectural and urban design education, but also in the culture of spatial development education; such attempts have been made for at least two decades.



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## Inicjatywy z zakresu powszechnej edukacji architektonicznej a rozbudzanie zainteresowań architekturą w Polsce

### Streszczenie

Polska z jednej strony ma niezwykle wartościowe doświadczenia w propagowaniu idei powszechnej edukacji architektonicznej, ale z drugiej strony kolosalnie zaniedbuje się w niej kształtowanie polityki architektonicznej. Celem artykułu było rozpoznanie, w jakim stopniu te wartościowe działania edukacji architektonicznej wpłynęły na rozbudzanie zainteresowań architekturą oraz czy mogły wpływać na wybór kierunku studiów. Przeprowadzono badanie ankietowe wśród 215 obecnych studentów architektury w Polsce. Przyniosło ono interesujące wyniki. Jednym z nich jest fakt, że pomimo wielu inicjatyw edukacyjnych na wysokim poziomie merytorycznym, ich zasięg miał niestety elitarny charakter. Większość ankietowanych studentów architektury stwierdziła, że nie zna żadnego ogólnopolskiego programu edukacji architektonicznej oraz że w okresie swojej edukacji obowiązkowej nie uczestniczyła w żadnych warsztatach architektonicznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** powszechna edukacja architektoniczna (PEA), edukacja architektoniczna dla wszystkich, edukacja przestrzenna