

## **'Inspire Future Generations' – Thornton Education Trust (TET) launch webinar (30 March 2021)**

*How do we engage young people meaningfully in the design of their built environment?*



Over 140 people joined the Thornton Education Trust's launch webinar 'Inspire Future Generations' to address this question, with our expert panel: Matt Bell, Corporate Affairs Director at Grosvenor & co-creator of 'Voice Opportunity Power' Karen Jelenje - Founder of social enterprise Activate the City Jorge Raedó - Founder, Osa Menor, Colombia-based arts education organisation, Fiona MacDonald - Head of Learning, Design Museum/Matt + Fiona, Simeon Shtebunaev - Birmingham City University and TET Chair Victoria Thornton.

**The panel and audience explored 3 key questions that the Trust seeks to answer through its work:**

- *What are the current obstacles to engaging children and young people in the design process?*
- *Who are the main stakeholders we need to influence?*
- *How do we achieve a step change?*

## **1. What are the current obstacles to engaging children and young people in the design process?**

The way in which the processes involved in creating the built environment do not allow young people to get involved easily in the decision-making and therefore not often serve young people's needs.

Until recently there hasn't been the will to address this issue, or the capacity and capability within the development or planning sectors to enable young people to get fully involved.

Architecture and urban design are not part of the mainstream school curriculum resulting in young people not having the knowledge and awareness to be able to fully contribute to decision-making process and accessing the architecture profession. As a result, we are losing valid skills and ideas for making a better built environment, as well as the benefit of young people's lived experience.

When it does engage with young people in schools, the architecture profession often sees it as an add-on or extra-curricular activity, rather than core to the design process.

## **2. Who are the main stakeholders we need to influence?**

- Schools
- Universities
- Wider society: including community groups/architecture centres
- Architecture profession
- Development industry
- Planning profession/local authorities

## **3. How do we achieve a step change?**

We need systemic change to make a real difference. We can do this through creating:

- A 'circular economy' of education - everyone helping one another across the generations
- Collaborations across disciplines
- Processes and systems that work in parallel to support wider objectives
- An international movement to give young people around the world a greater sense of agency, not just in the built environment; recognising that curriculums, culture, politics and power relationships are different across nations and continents and don't always translate ie 'one size doesn't fit all'.

***What do we need from each stakeholder group?***

**1. Architecture profession**

- Embed engagement with young people through schools/in the community as part of corporate responsibility/ESG goals
- Support a wider understanding of civic engagement, starting in universities and through to the institutes and own architectural practice
- Normalise a culture of pro bono, volunteer work
- Work with professional bodies to ensure training and delivery to young people is part of professional development.

**2. Development industry**

- Embed engagement with young people across the sector and in individual companies through research, advocacy and policy
- Create replicable training programmes to resolve the industry's lack of capability and capacity to engage young people.

**3. Planning/local authorities**

- Instigate and support planning reform to make guidance for creating child-friendly cities (such as that produced by GLA) mandatory
- Change criteria for planning applications: if young people haven't been consulted in developments that affect them, planning committees can't approve applications
- Focus efforts on neighbourhood and city-scale working alongside local authorities.

**4. Wider society**

- Listen to what young people want and understand the challenges they face
- Find community champions/gatekeepers and providing platforms that increase their visibility in wider society
- Deliver programmes through people who children can relate to: seeing 'people like me' helps young people to engage
- Help young people in the community to advocate, replicate and pass knowledge between themselves.

## 5. Schools

- More school funding and opportunities for architects to teach in schools
- More, and better, training for professionals to build their capacity to teach in schools
- Education reform: recognising young people's skills and ideas independent of grades
- Ultimate goal: include architecture in the school curriculum.

## 6. Universities

- Support greater collaboration between academic researchers and the built environment profession
- Create structural change in architecture schools, e.g. design degrees to include modules that demonstrate and encourage practical change for real people.

### **Questions and comments from the audience:**

*Are there any thoughts on how we can involve university students in a dialogue with school students on future neighbourhoods? Practitioners often can be seen as being a little distant from the young guys.*

*The idea of placemaking as art and science, once grasped by young people, will help them to interpret their environments and inspire both constructive criticism and a better future.*

*Engagement must be seen by all as being essential, otherwise it will, like many things, be filed under 'too difficult'. Back to the resourcing issue.*

*One thing I would love to see a sea change with is work experience provision within the sector.*

*Excellent initial debate. Lots of food for thought. We need to act!!!*

*Very inspiring discussion in a moment when participation is fundamental for decision making.*

### **What next?**

For more information and to get involved with TET contact:

[info@thorntoneducationtrust.org](mailto:info@thorntoneducationtrust.org)

<https://www.thorntoneducationtrust.org/>

Follow us on Twitter: @thorntoneducat1

LinkedIn TET (ThorntonEducationTrust) YouTube: TET\_ArchiTV