

Professional Ethics in Architecture and Responsibilities of Architects towards Humanity*

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Abstract: In the process of the production of space, architects are representatives of institutional knowledge. They have power and control over production of space either directly by taking part in this process via their personal practices or indirectly by affecting it through their professional organizations. The role of professional ethics in architecture should be limiting and leading this power through describing architect's responsibilities and also should be preventing unethical attitudes in all kinds of spatial practices by using this power and knowledge. However the professional codes prepared by architects' organizations generally frame personal responsibilities of architects, tend to protect the professional interests and ignore collective responsibilities of architects. This article is an attempt to criticize professional ethics in general and codes of architectural ethics particularly within the framework of responsibilities of architecture towards humanity. For this purpose, the draft document on ethical conduct prepared by Ankara Chamber of Architects, Code of Professional Conduct of Royal Institute of British Architects – RIBA and Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct of American Institute of Architects – AIA will be investigated as case studies.

Key Words: Professional Ethics, Architectural Profession, Architectural Ethics, Codes of Professional Ethics.

Professionalism has been an identified and established fact in social structures. Magali Sarfatti Larson, in her book *The Rise of Professionalism* (1977) describes professions as a systematic attempt to delimitate a non-competitive area and protect it from market forces. She also adds that the rules and regulations of a profession protect the privileged status of the profession and prevent outsiders from penetration. Larson, with an emphasis on the internal dynamics of professions, states that people who have particular titles get organized in order to prevent others from getting involved in these professions. However, the reasons for the emergence of professions

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cannot only be explained by personal or collective purposes of professionals. Looking at a larger scale, professions are also important mechanisms in social structures that can control the balance of power.

Hence, the transformation of a discipline into a profession, in Larson's words (1977) has four major stages. The first of these is the union of professionals, which is followed by defining a knowledge field and securing it through schools. The next stage is identifying the norms of practice in this field, and thus guaranteeing the protection of the state, and finally getting the approval of the public for their restrictive practices.

Different from universities where thoughts are freely and critically discussed, vocational schools aim at passing on professional knowledge from generation to generation. These schools restrict questioning and focus on training mechanical individuals who are isolated from society and humanity, and are equipped with knowledge and skills limited to the professional field only. Professional organizations of such individuals, in many areas and countries, have monopolistic and anti-democratic forms of organization, and often ignore the public interest. They tend to be structured to ensure the interests of the guild, and even more dangerously to be pursuing the interests of capital owners or the state. The approval they get from vocational schools, the power they gain through professional organizations and having the state and the capital on their side give them the ability to guide the society and have extensive 'capabilities' to impose all kinds of social agreement within the context of maintenance of the social order.

Harun Tepe makes a reference to this 'capability' and explains the relationship between scientific advances and professional activities and ethics. He discusses whether 'being capable' should allow or constitute an excuse for "doing" in professional ethics. Noting an increase in "doing", Tepe expresses a concern for the increase in ethical issues and the number of people affected by these issues, arising from the use of this power (Tepe, 2000, p. 1). Concerns that emerge from an increase in the ethical issues in many professions help shaping professional ethics that focus on the potential effects of professions on the future of humanity. Professional ethics of various professions have some similarities as well as differences, and in all occupations there is a concern for personal and interpersonal relationships. For this reason, Tepe says "ethical issues arising in personal or interpersonal situations will not differ too much in different professions, yet in many cases, these issues will be similar" (Tepe, p. 2).

According to Kuçuradi, “commonness in ethical problems is more fundamental and decisive than the differences resulting from the features of professions and uniqueness of ethical issues” (cited in Tepe, 2000, p. 3). Kuçuradi describes the most significant similarity of professional ethics as their pursuit of common norms. The boom in professional ethics in recent years could be explained with the quest to find common norms along with the dominance of meta-ethics in philosophy (Kuçuradi, 2000, p. 22-23). Within the framework of common norms, ethical documents prepared for different professions in particular by UNESCO and several international and professional organizations identify various norms and principles for the prevention of unethical attitudes and behaviors in these professionals (Tepe, p. 1-2).

These norms and principles should declare not only the rules to be respected by professionals while performing their professional actions but also the responsibilities of these professions towards humanity. Unfortunately, as claimed by Larson, many of today’s professional ethics documents comprise only the personal responsibilities of a segment of professionals. These documents generally describe “noble” forms of behavior that the professionals at the top of the organizations’ hierarchy rank expect from the lower ranks to exhibit (Larson, 1977).

Today’s codes of professional ethics focus on personal responsibilities of professionals rather than cover all the mechanisms involved in the emergence of the profession, and ethical problems in these mechanisms. Thus, they ignore the risks that arise on a larger scale caused by the accumulation of power and authority. As underlined by Spector, the codes of ethics prove that the profession is committed to higher forms of behavior, and strive to sustain the market of the profession. However, they seem to be superficial when explored more deeply (Spector, 2005).

In his article titled *Professional Ethics and Beyond*, Peter Marcuse connects this to the historic role of professionalism, i.e., the social agreement between society and the members of the profession. According to this agreement, in return for some privileges including social status and restrictions in competition, the profession has agreed to a certain measure of self-policing, and these measures are an important part of professional ethics. Marcuse thinks this agreement is the one made within the existing structure of society and helps a more efficient functioning of this structure. In other words, rather than restricting the system, professional ethics exist to

maintain the system. For this reason, codes of professional ethics and self-policing mechanism, do not allow any challenge against these structures, nor make such a demand. However, Marcuse believes that the professional ethics could go beyond their present client-serving and guild-related roles in order to analyze the real effects of social, economic and political systems that the ethical issues are taking place in. Professional ethics can develop an interest in the subject of power, and can take action to promote values such as equality and democracy. Furthermore, professional ethics can and should support the change of the system and the movements in the direction of new power relationships (Marcuse, 1976, pp. 272-273).

Ethics of Architecture

Architectural professional practices that are carried out by those who are entitled to use the title of “Architect”, in Weisman’s definition, are the records of the works that have been done by those who have the power and capability to build (Weisman, 1992, p. 2). In the profession of architecture, the accumulation of the power and capability to build, or the capability that comes through the cooperation with capital and power and the interaction of this power with social, political, economic, and cultural factors has been causing concerns. Precisely for this reason, it is necessary to establish ethical frameworks that will limit and guide this power (Sadri, 2010).

Spector (2001) says that the moral mission of architecture was questioned in the 1970s with Jane Jacobs’ and Robert Venturi’s criticisms against the movement of modernism, and points out the recent collapse of the social responsibility concept in the profession. According to Spector, other factors in the process of moral degradation and demoralization of architecture are social scientists’ questioning the legitimacy of professional ethics and deconstruction’s denial of the relationship between design and moral values (Spector, p. VIII, IX).

When one examines the documents reflecting the ethics in architecture that refuse to question the limits of the profession and ignore the collective responsibilities of the profession, the main purpose of these documents seems to be the improvement of the profession’s image and protection of its market share (Sadri, 2010). For Spector, public approval of the profession of architecture is linked to the improvement of its image. Thus, achieving autonomy for the profession, maintaining its public

approval, and carrying out ambitious works are the main concerns of the professional regulations and make the codes of professional ethics not to represent universal values of humanity. The status of professional ethics which plays an important role in helping the depoliticized and demoralized architectural profession to demarcate its borders, preserve its market share, improve its image and thus gain cultural capital will be analyzed through the ethical documents such as the draft text prepared by the Turkish Chamber of Architects, Ankara Branch, RIBA Professional Code of Conduct, and AIA Code of Ethics.

Examples of Codes of Professional Ethics in Architecture

The Draft Text of the Chamber of Architects

Under the auspices of the Chamber of Architects of Turkey, Ankara Branch, the ethics committee prepared a draft text entitled *Deontological Codes in Architecture* in 2008. This document has been adapted from the codes of conduct prepared by International Union of Architects (Union Internationale Des Architectes [UIA] and The Architects' Council of Europe [ACE], and the regulation related to the Architectural Profession Practice, solidarity among architects, protection of architects' honor and dignity, by Chamber of Architects of Turkey, (TMMOB, 2008).

This document comprises four different obligations of architects. Firstly, General Obligations mentions nine sub-fields of general obligations including, (1) ensuring the public that they meet the required standards, (2) making informed and unbiased professional assessments, (3) serving the community, employers, colleagues, and clients, (4) developing their professional knowledge and skill, in all areas relevant to their practices, (5) raising the standards of excellence in all relevant areas of architecture, (6) contributing to the competence of building industries, and (7) having sufficient qualified and supervisory staff in their practices. These seven articles evidently target public approval and improvement of the image of the profession. However, the eighth article mentions the recognition of an architects' right, rather than a liability, and says "the architect, ... shall have a right to terminate a contract for architectural services". The last article mentions that architects should not modify their fee proposals by taking into account other architects' fees for a service (TMMOB, 2008). This article intends to preserve the market of architectural profession rather than serving as an

ethical responsibility, and constitutes evidence for holding the benefits of the architectural profession above public good.

The second part of this document lists fifteen articles related to the architects' obligations to society. The first article states that architects with the aim of protecting the image of the profession must abide by the laws governing their professional activities, and to take account of the social and environmental impact of their professional activities. The second article says architects "must respect and help to conserve and develop the system of values of the community in which they are creating architecture" (TMMOB, 2008). Here, it is clear that there is an effort to obtain a social capital, because rather than the universal values of humanity; the focus is on social values that the architectural practices are taking place. However sometimes these two sets of values may conflict with each other and sometimes social values may even violate ethics. In summary, this article requires architects to satisfy the communities they work in.

The fourth article of this section includes a recommendation for architects not to promote or represent themselves or their professional services in a false or deceptive manner. The fifth article recommends avoiding acting in a way which is likely to raise doubt about their impartiality or integrity. The sixth article, similarly advises architects not to make any statements which may be misleading or unfair to others or otherwise discreditable to the profession or their client or user. The tenth article that is not directly related to ethics is a recommendation for participating in community activities. The eleventh article talks about considering cultural differences and client benefits, and the twelfth article, preserving the city's identity, integrity, and appearance. The fifteenth article emphasizes the "pioneering and developing identity" of the architect and aims to protect the superior and positive attributes of architects and the image of the profession (TMMOB, 2008).

'Obligations to Public' section also includes topics such as the high design quality and sustainability (article 3); architects' compliance with the code of conduct (article 7); realization of services in an unprejudiced and unbiased manner (article 8); taking professional standards into consideration (article 9) and developing awareness for the concept of "public interest" and avoiding taking part in activities focused solely on profit (article 13) (TMMOB, 2008). These articles are directly linked to the responsibilities of architects as individuals, but fail to raise an issue about their collective responsibilities. The fourteenth article of this section transcends the boundaries of

personal and professional practices of architects and signifies a collective responsibility and sensitivity. By saying, “architects should lead the way in the determination of the needs of the city”, this article emphasizes the guiding role of architects and thus honors the profession (TMMOB).

RIBA Code of Professional Conduct

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), which is one of the most influential architecture organizations with its forty-four thousand members and nearly hundred and eighty-year history, published its Code of Professional Conduct in 2005. This Code which sets out and explains the standards of professional conduct and practice that the Royal Institute requires of its members, comprises three principles of professional conduct, namely honesty, competence and relations; professional values that support those principles; and guidance notes which explain how the principles can be upheld (RIBA, 2005).

Principles put forth under the heading of honesty in this code include rules expecting architects to abide by in the architecture practices in order to get public approval for. Within the context of this principle, architects are required to act with impartiality, responsibility and truthfulness at all times in their professional and business activities. As stipulated in the code, they should not allow themselves to be improperly influenced either by their own, or others', self-interest; offer or take bribes, and they should avoid conflicts of interest and either remove its cause, or withdraw from that situation. Members should not be a party to any statement which they know to be untrue, misleading, and unfair to others or contrary to their own professional knowledge (RIBA, 2005).

The principles put forth in the competence principle clearly show how a code of professional conduct intends to protect the interests of clients, and thus the market of the profession. RIBA require its members to apply high standards of skill, knowledge and care in all their work. Members should inform their clients about all the possibilities, prices and other matters related to the project and make a written agreement with them, should keep their clients informed of the progress of a project and of the key decisions made on the client's behalf, and use their best endeavors to meet the client's agreed time, cost and quality requirements for the project (RIBA, 2005).

AIA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) is considered one of the world's largest and most influential architecture organizations. The institute was established around one hundred and fifty five years ago and it has eighty thousand members. In 2007, AIA updated its Code of Ethics & Professional Conduct which states guidelines for the conduct of Members in fulfilling their professional obligations. The Code is arranged in three tiers of statements: Canons, Ethical Standards, and Rules of Conduct. Canons are broad principles of conduct, and Ethical Standards (E.S.) are more specific goals toward which members should aspire in professional performance and behavior. The rules of Conduct are mandatory; and violation of a rule is grounds for disciplinary action by the Institute.

The first canon is named as “General Obligations”, however comprises individual obligations of architects towards their profession and protection of the image and the market of their profession. According to this canon, members should maintain and advance their knowledge of the art and science of architecture, respect the body of architectural accomplishment, contribute to its growth, thoughtfully consider the social and environmental impact of their professional activities, and exercise learned and uncompromised professional judgment (AIA, 2007).

The second canon is titled “Obligations to the Public” and again mentions individual responsibilities of architects in order for their profession to get public approval. Within the context of this canon, members should embrace the spirit and letter of the law governing their professional affairs and should promote and serve the public interest in their personal and professional activities (AIA, 2007).

The third canon “Obligations to the Client” lays out some rules for improvement of the image of the profession. According to this canon, architects should serve their clients competently and in a professional manner, and should exercise unprejudiced and unbiased judgment when performing all professional services. The ethical standards in this canon are competence, avoiding conflict of interest, candor, truthfulness, and confidentiality (AIA, 2007).

The fourth and fifth canons underline the obligations of architects towards their profession, and the market. Within the scope of the fourth canon, architects should uphold the integrity and dignity of the profession. The ethical standards of this canon are honesty and fairness, dignity and integ-

riety. The fifth canon describes the obligations to colleagues and says ‘members should respect the rights and acknowledge the professional aspirations and contributions of their colleagues.’ The ethical standards of this canon are professional environment, intern and professional development, and professional recognition.

The title of the sixth canon is “obligations to the environment”. In this canon architects are required to be sensitive to the environmental issues in their personal designs. However, for example the role and responsibility of the profession of architecture in the emergence or prevention of environmental disasters caused by economic and political decisions related to construction industry and a variety of production of space processes are not touched upon.

This document places the emphasis on architects’ personal responsibilities, but neglects the responsibilities of the profession towards humanity and architects’ collective responsibilities.

Results

Larson’s (1977), Spector’s (2005) and Marcuse’s (1976) criticisms towards codes of professional ethics show that these documents are written in order to identify the boundaries of the profession, and aim to protect its market share, improve its image, obtain cultural capital and get public approval for the profession. Codes of professional ethics, on the other hand, should focus on the interests of humanity, rather than professional interests, and the ethics of architecture as well should be developed with a focus on universal values. Architectural ethics which is built on universal human achievements and values that have been developed and formed throughout history shall approach architecture in a holistic manner, as a cultural and social phenomenon, and shall not restrict and reduce it down to a profession which is monopolized by architects.

Today’s ethics of architecture, as examined in the codes of conduct in this article, appear to concentrate on personal responsibilities of architects, and ignore the bigger picture, which consists of social structure, power, unethical attitudes and behaviors of the profession and the professional organizations. Thus, architecture is reduced to a personal practice, and any other works such as relations between people and space are regarded as outside personal practices, and excluded. In this case, laws which are directly related

to architecture, such as “urban regeneration law”, the projects developed by various institutions which may have serious social and spatial effects, such as the project for the “third bridge” over the Bosphorus in Istanbul; and issues such as construction industry, construction techniques and materials which are directly related to the field of architecture but are not included in architects’ job descriptions, remain outside of the interests of architectural ethics. It is clear that ethical responsibilities of all actors in the field of architecture need to be included in the documentation. In addition to the ethical responsibilities of different actors, architects, hold liability due to their roles in the use and production of spaces (Sadri, 2010). Thus, in addition to the ethical responsibilities in their personal practices, architects should be sensitive to the ethical responsibilities of all actors, and feel responsible for others’ works as well as their own. The collective power and responsibility of architects require them to prevent and stop unethical acts in architecture.

For this reason, three important conditions must be met in order for the architectural ethics to prosper towards a focus of responsibility for humanity. The first of these conditions is transcending the boundaries of the profession and regarding architecture within the framework of all the pertaining social activities and including obligations of all actors in this field. Secondly, moving away from professional conduct documents which describe architects’ personal responsibilities towards a collective understanding of the ethical responsibilities is needed. The third condition is, in order to prevent possible losses resulting from the definition of collective responsibilities, human values and universal norms should be concentrated on, while determining the principles of professional ethics.

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