



**Position Paper:**  
**Architectural Research in Switzerland**  
Architectural Council of Switzerland

Date: August 17, 2022

## Context

All the important challenges of our time, such as climate change, social inclusion and technical innovation, are reflected in our built environment. Climate neutrality is unattainable without an ecological, sustainable *Baukultur*,<sup>1</sup> while our heterogeneous society needs spaces that enable and encourage interaction.

Work on and with the built environment is based both on theoretical research and practical experiments, leading to new insight. Since its beginnings, the discipline has always involved the systematic investigation of existing sources of knowledge, the generation of new insight and the further development of architectural processes. Evidence of this can be seen in the many architectural publications reaching back into Antiquity.

The aim of this position paper is to strengthen the excellence of architectural research in Switzerland. In the United Kingdom, the USA and Scandinavian countries, architectural research is a fixed element of teaching in MA and PhD programmes, as well as in architectural practice. In 2013, the European Association for Architectural Education (EAAE) published its “Charter on Architectural Research”, a document that serves as a common guideline for European research institutions in implementing architectural research.<sup>2</sup> In Switzerland, only few public funding programmes are explicitly dedicated to architectural research.

Due to the key importance of research for the built environment, the Architectural Council of Switzerland regards the lack of architectural research funding in most universities not only to be a major flaw, but also to be the reason why the field has lost its pioneering role with respect to matters of *Baukultur*.

## Mission

The Architectural Council recommends that Swiss academic policy-makers on a cantonal and national level install genuine research funding structures in the field of architecture.

Architecture must have an equal status compared to other fields of research.

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1 <https://davosdeclaration2018.ch/>

2 <https://www.eaae.be/about/statutes-and-policypapers/eaae-charter-architectural-research/>

## **The Architectural Council of Switzerland declares:**

- **Architectural research funding must support transdisciplinary research on spatial aspects.**

A key element of architectural research focuses on all aspects of space. Using analogue and digital design processes, architecture gains new insight on spatial relationships and qualities through sketches, images and models. Furthermore, architects can draw from research approaches in various fields to expand their knowledge. The spectrum ranges from historical and cultural methods to sociological processes<sup>3</sup> and even includes techniques in the fields of engineering, natural sciences and material studies.<sup>4</sup>

- **Architectural research funding must involve the interface between academic research and architectural practice**

Switzerland enjoys a profound tradition of craftsmanship, a focus on construction skills and a deep-rooted emphasis on practice-orientated architectural teaching. Outstanding research results are achieved both through practical work and by studying in an academic environment, as well as by the professional excellence that exists in universities and architectural offices. This close connection between professional and academic work must be taken into account when awarding architectural research funds.

- **Architectural research funding must be awarded by an independent peer community.**

Until now, funds for research have been approved by two bodies that largely consist of people who are not experts in the field. An example of this is the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF), which awards funding in architecture through its Humanities and Social Sciences Department. This distribution of funds via non-expert bodies entails the risk of significant transfer losses. Award processes must be able to rely on expert support from the peer community and determine the distribution of funds within this field.

- **Architectural research funding must support the communication of knowledge using various media.**

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<sup>3</sup> e.g. research in archives and the observation of changing building and residential cultures, such as the effects of migration and pandemics on social cohabitation

<sup>4</sup> e.g. the introduction of new building materials, the development of digital design methods and the follow-up use of infrastructures, as well as building typologies and element and material cycles

In accordance with the transdisciplinarity of architectural research, knowledge is communicated using different media. Researching architects must receive support to communicate their insight in new media, books, magazine articles, lectures and exhibitions, as well as design objects, building prototypes and completed edifices. The Architectural Council of Switzerland calls for the establishment of a national peer-review platform for academic work and projects, in order to be successful on an international level.

- **Architectural research funding must support various careers.**

Due to their proximity to the profession, research careers in architecture do not exclusively remain within academic institutions. Many researching architects switch from universities to professional practice and back again. Furthermore, architects apply methods from various academic disciplines to generate new insight. Such careers may be unusual to other disciplines, but are a fixed part of architectural research culture.

- **Architectural research funding must support heterogeneous research networks.**

Precisely because architectural research is so diverse, there is special potential in combining different perspectives and approaches. Thanks to its transdisciplinary practice, architecture is a field in which researchers from a very wide range of disciplines come together. In addition to researchers at universities, this also applies to protagonists in industry and politics. Such collaboration should be consolidated and actively integrated into research funding on a regional, national and international level.

## Conclusion

Architecture is not only an essential element of *Baukultur*, but also carries great responsibility for the future of our entire living environment. Architects in Switzerland have a comprehensive toolbox of theories and methods that make key contributions to solving the challenges of our time. Architects cannot address current and future issues without genuine architectural research funding. Thus, the Architectural Council of Switzerland recommends that cantonal and national science policy provides funding structures for architectural research in Switzerland.

President:



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## **Authors**

This position paper was produced by a group of seven experts:

Walter Angonese, Bernhard Böhm, Heike Biechteler, Martin Fröhlich, Joachim Huber, Johannes Käferstein, Sascha Roesler.

The process of formulating this position paper mainly involved three workshops organised by the Architectural Council, on the basis of which the key content and demands of this document were developed.

The first workshop on November 4, 2020 focused on the content of architectural research. The following speakers took part:

Bernhard Böhm (ETH Zurich), Roberto Cavallo (TU Delft), Murray Fraser (Bartlett School of Architecture), Carlo Nozza (USI Mendrisio), Sascha Roesler (USI Mendrisio), Holger Schurk (ZHAW Winterthur) and Angelika Schnell (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna).

At the workshop on February 10, 2022, representatives from various funding bodies reported on funding policy, guidelines and structures. Participants included Oya Atalay Franck (Swiss National Science Foundation), Philippe Bischof (Pro Helvetia), Florian Dombois (Zurich University of the Arts), Fabio Gramazio (ETH Zurich), Madeleine Schuppli (Pro Helvetia), Andrea Wald-Bruckner (Austrian Science Fund), Gesa Ziemer (German Science Council).

The meeting on December 8, 2021 was dedicated to visions of future research themes, collaboration and funding opportunities, to which representatives from the fields of politics, education and research were invited:

Ronny Hardliz (Visual Artist / Ph.D.), Jeffrey Huang (EPFL), Orkun Kasap (ETH Zurich), Andreas Kofler (Swiss Architecture Museum (SAM)), Brigitte Müller (Federal Office of Culture (BAK) – Baukultur Section), Rolf Schmitz (Swiss Federal Office of Energy (BFE)), Andreas Sonderegger (BSA Research Fellowship), Peter Schwehr (HSLU Lucerne), Yvonne Radecker (Materialarchiv), Roland Züger (Werk, Bauen + Wohnen).

In addition to the speakers, researchers from all architectural schools in Switzerland attended the workshops.