The Belgian Architects’ Act of 1939: turning point or gradual shift? Professional discussions and legal framework affecting the historical collaborative efforts of the building professionals.

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Abstract
In Belgium, the title and the profession of the architect were protected by law in 1939. This had impact on the duties of the architect, but also on the way building professionals (architect, engineer and contractor) collaborated. This paper investigates how this law, known as the Architects’ Act, had roots in nineteenth century concerns and was established only after long-lasting discussions conducted in the professional press. In these discussions: four themes were developed: diploma, monopoly, required competence and lastly artistic qualities of the architect. Moreover, the paper also demonstrates that a practice of designing and constructing complex buildings preceded the law.

Interwar challenges to the profession of the architect in Belgium

On 20 February 1939, the Belgian parliament voted the law on the “Protection of the title and the profession of the architect” known as the Architects’ Act. This created a new, legally binding context which attributed more well-defined roles to architects, but also, albeit more implicitly, to engineers and contractors. Consequently from this turning point onwards, the way in which these building professionals interacted was also (largely) determined by law. This paper sets out to identify and disentangle the motives and arguments in the discussions preparing for the law, which surfaced at several moments in the professional press throughout the period 1882-1939. The historical discussions were rooted in the contemporary concerns of professional architects on how to deal with innovations in building programmes and typologies, but also with new materials and
techniques. From the nineteenth century onwards, the rising complexity in building required more specialist interventions in both the process of designing and building. Because of this, the role of the architect was increasingly challenged. The new demands also confronted architects with an increasing competition from technicians, contractors and engineers who did not only take up advisory roles, but also started acting as architects by drawing plans. This was the result of the lack of a clear legislative framework in which the liberal profession of architect was not protected and could be accessed by all. This was not always considered a problem: several established architects in Belgian architectural history never graduated as architect, which did not stand in the way of professional recognitions by their peers. The Architects’ Act, however, aimed to halt the ‘malpractices’ of the many ‘charlatans’ who pretended to be architect but lacked competence. In addition, the law was motivated also by the argument of protection of the client and, by extension, society as a whole, since it created a framework in which architects had to show they were properly trained, demonstrating a certified degree of competence. However, two aspects complicate the understanding of the law. Firstly, in-depth study of the practice of designing buildings\(^1\) revealed that some actions and habits adopted early onwards by professional builders (architect, engineer and contractor) were afterwards confirmed by law, especially in the case of complex buildings in need of a greater array of experts. Secondly and the topic of this paper, the details of the (mostly professional) preceding discussion on the aspect impacted the law of 1939 in diverging ways. The insights that were gained by looking at contemporary professional periodicals and protagonists (architects mainly) in this discussion revealed both the advancement of the professionalization of the architect and the engineer.

Belgium was early in the adoption of a law which was rather strict compared to laws in neighbouring countries (Italy: 1923, Great-Britain: 1931, France: 1977, The Netherlands: 1985).\(^2\) Specific about Belgium was that no state-organised training for architects exited, in contrast to, for example, the French Académie des Beaux-Arts.\(^3\) Architects in Belgium could only be trained in the locally organised Beaux-Arts academies but the diploma had no legal protection. The same was true for architects who were trained in the Saint-Lucas schools from 1862 onwards. Nonetheless, the Belgian State was involved in the organisation of the training of experts to be engaged in its state services such as the Corps des Ponts et Chausées. Experts in architecture were trained, albeit in very limited amount, from 1836 onwards, at Ghent University, where the diploma of Ingénieur-architecte\(^4\) was offered, largely based on the French model of the Ecole des Ponts et
This would lead to heated discussions in the 1930s on the profile and credibility of the architectural engineer.

In recent years, multiple authors expanded on the issue of the professionalization of the architect in diverse countries. These studies exposed the sometimes difficult economic, political or professional context in which architects had to perform, including the legal framework to which they were subjected. Dominique Raynaud, for instance, described the discussion that occurred in France from the *Code de Guadet* in 1895 up to the law of 1977, which showed similarities with the discussion in Belgium, especially in the debate of the required artistic qualities of the architect and his positioning with respect to civil engineers. Eleanor Jolliffe started from the writings of vocal professionals associated with RIBA, going back as early as 1791, to explain the Architects (Registration) Act of 1931, and commenting on the legislative framework going to 1997. Despite scholarly attention for the professionalization of architects, so far, little research has focused on the wider discussions in which professionalization and legalization of the profession of architects were given shape, and this is all the more true for the historical collaborative practices of architects or more complex professional profiles in the domain of architecture.

**Means to identify the historical concerns of professional practitioners in building**

The analysis of the professional and parliamentary discussions on the Architects’ Act is based on three different kinds of sources. The law itself, but also the parliamentary discussions give insight in the reasoning of the legislators. Next to these, the professional journals shine a light on the arguments, wishes and sighs of the professional actors, architects mainly.

The law of 1939 was comprised of 12 articles, in which four themes appeared to be crucial to the discussions: diploma, required competence, monopoly and artistic qualities of the architect. The first theme is offered by architects advocating to introduce a legally protected diploma for the architect, which is reflected in Article One, which explicitly states the diploma requirement. This relates to the second theme, the required competence, as the diploma is actually a means to guarantee sufficient competence to the individual acting as architect. Consequently, also, the interests of the client and society as a whole were (sufficiently) protected. This was not only realized by the diploma, but also by Article Four, which stated that the architect must make up the plans of a building project and survey the execution. Article Six stated that the profession of the
architect was incompatible with that of the contractor (or vendor of construction materials). According to Kristof Uytterhoeve, professor construction law at KU Louvain, Article Four and Six made up the ‘monopoly’ of the architect,\(^9\) which to this day has consequences on the construction process and on collaboration as well. This monopoly position was the third theme in the debate and its consequences were embedded in the process of professionalization of the architect in Belgium. Firstly, architects faced the competition of an increasing number of construction specialists, who were also eager to adopt the title of architect. Secondly, the expertise of civil engineers specifically was increasingly needed and were complementary to the architect’s skills and thirdly, more and more clients, including public authorities entrusted commissions to engineers, and not architects, putting both professions in competing positions. A fourth and last theme in the law and the discussions, was the claim that an architect had to honour specific artistic qualities. This last theme was not explicitly acknowledged in the final text of the law but the implementing provisions found back in the added Royal Decree of 15 March 1939.\(^{10}\) Still this was a mayor argument in distinguishing the true architect from all other builders during the discussions leading to the Architects’ Act.

Next to the law itself, the parliamentary discussions as published in the Proceedings (Dutch: “Handelingen” or French: “Annuaires”) of the chamber of representatives, or the senate offered a useful source to further explore the discussion. They allowed to identify the actors involved on the side of the legislators, to understand which aspects they considered of concern and, lastly, to see if the professional organizations were able to lobby efficiently and influence the debate. Taking into account the long and interrupted period during which the debate took place, these actors could not be situated in a coherent network.

Former research already indicated that also Belgian professional periodicals in the realm of building are important in shaping the professions as they directly and indirectly influence training, practices of self-regulation, legal procedures, the application of a code of ethics, etc.\(^{11}\) Jelena Dobbels already studied extensively the “General contractors’ periodicals”\(^{12}\) from this approach. Similar explorations of architectural journals established these publications as crucial actors in the professional debate. Research on architectural periodicals for instance revealed that professional architectural periodicals were not only a means for communication on contemporary practice, but also acted as “authorities of distinction” for architects, and puts them on the same footing as the profession’s established institutions.\(^{13}\) This paper builds on these findings, and for a majority of
the text cited the author was not just a critical observer, but took part in the institutional discussions leading to the Architects’ Act.

Four periodicals were scrutinized, all of them related to specific fractions of the professional group of architects and thus illustrating the heterogeneity of the profession: L’Émulation, La Cité, La Technique des Travaux and L’Ingénieur-architecte/De ingenieur architect. L’Émulation, (1874-1939) was the mouthpiece of the Société Centrale d’Architecture de Belgique (S.C.A.B. 1872-2009) the oldest and largest professional organisation for architects in Belgium before 1939.14 Since its founding in 1872, S.C.A.B. was concerned with the recognition of the profession of the architect. According to architectural historian Benoît Mihail, S.C.A.B. encouraged collaboration with other building professionals, yet also promoted the protection of the title of architect which was considered an empowerment of the ‘competent’ architect.15 The second periodical under scrutiny was La Cité, (1919-1935), founded by Raphaël Verwilghen (1885-1963) and Fernand Bodson (1877-1966). The periodical represented an important voice in the interwar period in Belgium and served as the forum of the modernist organization SBUAM (Société Belge des Urbanistes et Architectes Modernes).16 La Technique des Travaux (1925-1940; 1947-1977) on the other hand, is essentially a commercial periodical issued under the auspices of the Cie Internationale des Pieux Franki, (established by Edgard Frankignoul), specialized in deep foundations using a patented technique. Stephanie van de Voorde remarked earlier that “notwithstanding their commercial intentions, the periodical is very informative and thorough on all aspects of building.”17 This periodical provided an interesting account on how the construction industries took position within the architectural debate. Lastly, the periodical L’Ingénieur-architecte/De ingenieur architect (1935-1939; 1953; 1955; 1965), issued by the Société des Ingénieurs-Architectes sortis des Universités de Belgique, was selected since this periodical voiced the actors with the specific profile of engineer-architect. The society was founded in 1935 and set out to counter balance to the institutionalised views of the architects. The instigator of the initiative was the Belgian engineer-architect Léonide Novgorodski who took on the daily tasks of issuing the periodical and was also a prolific collaborator and author on La Technique des Travaux. In total, about 25 articles were selected in these periodicals with the majority of them published in L’Émulation, the professional journal which discussed the profile of the architect most prominently.
Discussion in the professional periodicals

Towards a legal diploma for architects

A first trace of the attempts to legally protect the title of the architect and to create a legal framework for the recognition of the diploma, goes back to the law proposal compiled by members of the S.C.A.B. in 1882 to be submitted (but rejected) to the chambers of parliament on 25 September 1883. L’Émulation already printed an account on this proposal in issue 10 of 1882, which indicated that this was a pressing matter for S.C.A.B. In the report, the president of S.C.A.B. Valère Dumortier (1848-1903) posed the question “What knowledge is required to obtain a degree in architecture?” 18 This question, together with the efforts to install a minimum honorarium for architects, resulted in the conclusion that a minimum fee only made sense if the client had guarantees that the architect was sufficiently competent. Dumortier continued on the current state of architectural education in Belgium and ventilated this own opinion on what the Beaux-Arts education taught its students. He praised the quality and amount spent on the training in artistic principles, but acknowledged that the scientific part of the program was non-existent. 19 He was as critical to the training at the Ecole Polytechnique in Brussels as it surely offered a strong teaching in general scientific matters, but it did not consider the artistic principles as paramount. The initial proposal of S.C.A.B. was to establish a national school of architecture, similar to French model, which would be the only institution authorised to issue a statutory diploma (regardless of existing schools). Coherent with the French model, the report made explicit that S.C.A.B. saw institutional knowledge (thus schools) as a guarantee of quality on basic knowledge both in design and construction, which was not to be learned from ‘practical’ experience. However the efforts of this first proposal stranded and the educational landscape did not change much, apart from the law of 10 April 1890 which recognised a number of ‘legal degrees’ for engineers. 20

In 1908 the issue resurfaced when Paul Bonduelle (1877-1955), fierce critic and architect who was concerned about the profile and the status of the architect in society, re-addressed the diploma question briefly in his key article “La situation de l’Architecte en Belgique.” 21 Bonduelle considered the obligation to hold a certified diploma as a tool to “remove the unworthy from the profession”. 22
After World War I, the discussion on the diploma flared up again when the National Congress of Belgian Architects, organised in 1919, called for action to finally establish a legal diploma and to protect the profession. This call was answered by Gustave Maukels (1856-1933), architect, member (and president 1914-18) of S.C.A.B. and fierce advocate for the protection of the profession, who took a series of initiatives in 1920-1921 of which the result was published in his article “Le diplôme d’architecte”.23 Maukels mentioned that several letters were sent to Jules Destrée (1863-1936) then Ministre des Sciences et des Arts, whose response did not provide the desired breakthrough. It was only after the intervention of Joris Helleputte (1852-1925) architect, politician (for the Conservative Catholic Party), and professor at the university of Leuven who warned Maukels that his efforts could not count on much response from the minister, that the S.C.A.B. reached out to Adolphe Buyl (1862-1932), representative of the Liberal Party. Buyl promised to get the parliamentary discussion going. Eventually, it would take until 1924 for the first proposal to be submitted, supported also by the representatives Paul Wauwermans (1861-1941), and Frans Fischer (1875-1949). A year later, a renewed proposal, backed again by Wauwermans and Buyl and this time joined by Jules Destrée (1863-1936) and Jules de Gérandon (1869-1933) again met too much resistance.24

In the final proposal in 1936-37, which would ultimately lead to the creation of a legal framework, the diploma requirement was one of the most pressing issues, as both the professionals, critics and legislators were convinced this would lead to more well-trained professionals not only in questions of design but also in construction challenges. This requirement was not only a factor to protect the (economic) interests of the architects, but also the interests and investments of clients as the risk of ‘incompetence’ was reduced.

The required competence serving as a protection of the clients’ ‘capital’ and society’s ‘common good’

The introduction of an official diploma for architects was seen as an opportunity not only to defend the (financial) interests of the client, but also to lead to better safety in buildings, a higher quality of spaces, improved hygiene, as well as guarding the aesthetics of the buildings and the appearance of cities in general.25 Still, some of these aspects, like safety (structural or fire) or health concerns
related to heating and ventilation were already shifting to the tasks of the engineer. Dumortier was conscious of this evolution already in 1882.

Together with Article One of the Architects’ Act, Article Four intended to protect these concerns both for the individual and society as Article Four states that: “clients (private and public) must rely on the assistance of an architect for drawing up plans and supervising the execution of works (for which a prior application for permission to build has been imposed).”26 With this, the law aimed at a certain standard that all buildings had to reach, because also the certification of the architect was guaranteed (resulting from Article 1).

The discussion of architecture as a public commodity, or of a good of common interest, returned in the writings of Bonduelle in 1908, when he complained about the “poor state of architectural appreciation” in Belgium27. Bonduelle suggested that architecture was the only art form which touched on “all aspects of human activity” and which formed the basis of all the arts plastiques, an art which even the general public was able to understand.28 Bonduelle was aware that engineers were entering the field of design and wanted to keep this agency in the hands of the architect. He argued that architecture did not only evolve in terms of aesthetic principles, but that architects needed to be concerned with “the necessities of hygiene, scientific inventions and not the least economic necessities.”29

In the critical years 1921-1922, Maukels acknowledged that a diploma should ensure the necessary quality of an architect’s work which would then also protect the common interest.30 In the July issue of 1922, in honour of the 50th anniversary of S.C.A.B., Bonduelle remarked that architects eventually united and formed a front to keep combatting for the status of the architect and that the public good can only be protected if public authorities would finally recognized the profession.31 In 1925, Adolphe Puissant (1878-1950, urbanist, architect, publicist and active member of S.C.A.B.) wrote on the societal importance of architecture in his article “L’architecte” published in the periodical La Technique des Travaux. With the publication of this text, the journal illustrated the concern of the editorial board with matters of all building professionals, including the architects. Puissant compared other liberal arts with architecture: "A bad work of literature cannot be read,… , but the work of a bad architect remains, clutters, imposes its size, perpetuates its errors, and is a deplorable burden on family or public budgets."32 Puissant made this point for two reasons. Firstly, he argued that the general public confused the architect with other professions, giving free reign to the ‘incompetents’ as he described them. Secondly, and more importantly, Puissant was
concerned about the spending on buildings, both private and public. Considering that this text was written for a technical journal with a wide target audience, this was a rather daring criticism, knowing the readers were entrepreneurs, contractors or engineers. Puissant repeated these concerns in an article in *L'Émulation* ten years later, in 1935.

Eventually, in the parliamentary discussions of 1936-37, the supposed additional cost of the mandatory employment of an architect, on the family budget was of main concern to the members of parliament. Still the law that passed, did not explicitly appoint a percentage of the construction cost as honorarium, to leave the architects to determine their fee. The fact that multiple authors, during the span of 1882-1939, continuously hammered on the dangers linked with the fixing of a fee proved worthwhile.

*The profession of the architect under pressure, leading to the monopoly*

The law imposed minimum requirements on architects to ensure their competence, but in the years before, there were very few regulations on exactly how the architect's role was to be fulfilled. On the one hand, this raised the debate between, the architect who felt threatened by the engineer since the latter was sometimes better trained to make certain design decisions. On the other hand, there were also the so-called ‘charlatans’ or ‘incompetents’ who threatened the role of the architect, which Article Six eventually had to put an end to, creating a monopoly for the architects, together with Article Four.

The discussion between Belgian architects and engineers goes at least back to 1852, when the Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-arts proclaimed to maintain the difference between the architect and the engineer, the former “needs to be an excellent artist”, the latter “a man of science”.

In the report of 1882, Dumortier posed the question on the compulsory knowledge for architects, to which he gave an unmistakable answer: “the architect has to be an artist and a builder, as much as a businessman.” This would resonate a few decades later with Louis Cloquet (1849-1920), graduated as Ingénieur Civil des Ponts et Chaussées and professor of architecture at Ghent University, who believed that society was in need for a building professional who personified the ideals and practical knowledge required by contemporary complex building: “architecte artiste et ingénieur” as he proclaimed in the last book of his five volume *Traité d'Architecture* (1891-1901).
The greatest threat for the architect, according to Bonduelle in 1908, was that incompetent and uneducated politicians had to take decisions on major and important works without considering the advice of experienced men (thus without advice of an architect) and putting their trust in the engineer: “At the top of all public administration services, the engineer replaces the architect”

To Bonduelle and his colleague architects, this was a growing concern at that time. In 1925, engineer Alfred Nyst (1877-1972), graduate of the mining faculty at the Liège University who developed an interest in architecture later in life, discussed two houses he designed in concrete, in *La Technique des Travaux*. In this short article “L’Ingénieur et le renouveau de l’architecture”, Nyst described the opportunity for the engineer to create a whole new architecture, arguing thus for a rational architecture, which can only be obtained by the engineer, as: “Today still, the engineer is the only one to combine these elements in a rational balance.” With this stance, Nyst not only defended his own professional position, but also voiced the admiration for the architectural capacities of engineers that was shared by many radical modernists. Nyst himself was an early member of the Belgian chapter of CIAM.

Ten years later, in 1935, a polemic was started by Puissant who condemned the profile of the engineer-architect. As a reaction to this, engineer-architect Jean-Norbert Cloquet (1881-1961, professor of architecture at Ghent University), defended the profile of the engineer-architect in the editorial statement of the periodical *L’Ingénieur-architecte/De ingenieur architect*. In the article “Que sommes-nous” Cloquet tried to uncover the *raison d’être* of the architect-engineer. He positioned himself somewhat against the members of *S.C.A.B.* (and specifically against Puissant), who argued that architecture is an art. Cloquet considered the designer to have both qualities in conception, but also in “art de bâtir”, or “the art of building”, therefore he considered the double profile of the engineer-architect as almost inevitable in contemporary practice. He argued that the engineer-architect had just as much ability to create ‘architecture’ as architects, and did not merely serve a supporting role. In order to strengthen his argument he cited examples from the past as he questioned whether it were architects or engineers who built the hypostyles of Karnak or the Parthenon.

For Cloquet, being able to combine both professions, it was possible to create an architecture in line with what Henry van de Velde called “l’architecture rationnelle”, which so many other modernists advocated for as well.
The artistic qualities of the architect

One of the most discussed aspects of the debate that flared up between the 1880s and 1930s, was the issue of the architect being an artist or having artistic qualities. Already in 1882, Dumortier argued that the architect should be an artist, but had to be a prolific builder as well. Louis Cloquet, in defence of the engineer-architect, was of the same opinion. These professionals saw artistic competence as a reason to distinguish the true architect from the ‘charlatans’. Next to that, it was also a means to question the aptness from the engineer, since it was established that engineers certainly possessed the necessary knowledge to build, but according to the critics they lacked these sensible artistic traits. However, this discourse impacted thinking and practice to large extent.

The issue of the architect-artist is not reflected in the law as the legislator did not want to dictate what architecture should look like, also perhaps they did not see the necessity to exclude engineers from building either. The concern about preserving the artistic assets of the country were only mentioned in the Royal Decree of 15 March 1939, which stated that an architect was only needed if: “the work is of such nature that … the architectural character would be changed”.

Like the other themes, the discussion on the artistic qualities of the architect started already in the nineteenth century and reached its pinnacle in the 1920s. In the second issue of La Cité, a certain Sir Michel (secretary of the Syndical Chambers of Architects in Belgium) argued that the tasks and obligations of the architect were rooted in knowledge of the arts and that an architect should strive to be a ‘true artist’ in contrast to “the vulgar builder who usurps the title of architect without having any of the qualities necessary to execute the job.” This again reflects the conviction that only training could create this kind of ‘true artist’.

In L’Émulation, multiple authors like Bonduelle, Maukels, Roosenboom or Puissant were very explicit about the fact that architects should be artists in the first place. This argument was defended with even more force when the discussion on modern architecture started to make its way to the journal. In 1928, when Jean De Ligne (1890-1985) became new editor in chief, a new era for L’Émulation commenced, with a publication policy more favourable towards new ideas.

During that year, even the declaration of La Sarraz (the start of the CIAM) was published in the periodical. Antoine Pompe (1873-1980), architect and moderate modernist, scrutinized modern architecture in 1929 and tried to understand what an architect was through his critical analysis of modern architecture. He wondered if it: “is an art or a science as the ‘purs’ from La Sarraz said it
Eventually, he concluded that it certainly was an art, as it touched up on human ‘feeling’ (‘sentiment’ in French). Architecture without art is only utilitarian construction, he stated, and this is what engineers create when they “don’t add any feeling to their x and y components in their formulas”. In 1935, Puissant culminated prolifically all the sighs, sorrows, criticism and anger of the last 10 years in an article in *L’Émulation*, simply called “La profession d’architecte.” The crisis in which the architects were in, was not only due to the fact that there was a reduction in construction activity (the economic crisis of the Great Depression also began to have its effect on Belgium), but also the surplus of architects. With the latter, he did not refer to architects proficient in their activity and with sufficient education, but to all sorts of individuals who abused the title, for instance designers linked to the industries or to construction firms (like masons, carpenters etc.), but also architects in service of public administration. In short: he refuted those who, following his understanding of the situation, dishonoured the title of the architect, with overall ‘social harm’ as a result: a disservice to society.

Further in the article he again resumed the long-standing arguments that “The architect is first and foremost an artist” as was pointed out regularly at that time in the defence of (traditional) architecture. However, he did make the case for collaboration: “Architecture is not only the art of building,..., the complexity of modern construction processes, the refinements of comfort and hygiene, impose on the architect the collaboration of many specialized technicians. But he retains his guiding mission as conductor of the orchestra,...”

**Discussion versus Act: the culmination of years of discussion**

Leading up to the voting of the Architects’ Act, another voice in the discussion appeared: Pierre Bourgeois (1898-1976), writer and architectural critic, brother of modernist architect Victor Bourgeois, who came to the conclusion that although much can be learned from the engineer, “Architects and engineers don’t know each other”. The criticism of Bourgeois can still be seen as exemplary for the historical context in which the architects, engineers and contractors collaborated, showing that over the years the two disciplines problematically drifted apart. The parliamentary discussions of 1936-37 indicate that there was a perceived necessity to regulate the profession and to introduce a diploma requirement. The members of the committee named a
number of requirements: the master builder needed to be (1) a man of finances, (2) he should be instructed in hygiene and health, (3) has to have qualities of an artist to protect the appropriateness of the outlook of cities and lastly, (4) he should be instructed on scientific principles, and not just be able to draw plans. Almost all these aspects stem from nineteenth century concerns on safety, health, protection of private and public capital and the preservation of patrimony which were raised early onwards in the debate. Nevertheless, at the turn of the century and especially in the 1920s and 1930s, the profession of architect was challenged from different angles. Not only the knowledgeable engineer started to influence the design process, but also clearly incompetent actors posed a threat to the profession of the architect and to society. These aspects supported the importance of the Architects’ Act as it ensured a legal framework that brought greater certainty to professionals, clients and society.

In the interwar years, collaboration in construction in Belgium formalized in the division of tasks and responsibilities between the architect, engineer and contractor. As case studies on complex building projects in this period already revealed, the architect was in charge of the initial design and mediated between the different kinds of specialists that were required in order to make the building ‘work’, trying to reach a complete and realist design. In most cases engineers were not only responsible for the calculation of load bearing structures, but were also in a position to influence the design to varying degrees, depending on the project and the architect. The same was true for contractors, who often were involved in dimensioning construction elements or establishing building procedures that impacted the built project. These shifting relations progressed on a pace, different then the procedure to install the Architects’ Act, depending from project to project. As a result, the law largely confirmed a self-regulating practice already put in place, at least in complex projects with technological challenges. Nonetheless, the law also was set, if not mainly, to regulate common practice, involved mainly with bread and butter projects.

The discussion leading to the Architects’ Act was a lively theme for over 50 years, carried by many influential voices in these periods. Remarkably, their architectural profiles are not entirely homogenous and the nuances seem to resonate the specific professional profile of each voice: architect, modernist architect, engineer-architect, or engineer. On the side of the legislator, a similar conclusion was drawn: as the timespan prolonged, different elections show that different heterogeneous networks of ministers and members of parliament were sometimes more favourable towards the idea of protecting the profession than others.
At first glance, the text of the law corresponds largely to the aspects raised in the preceding discussion, yet with a closer look, it appeared that the concerns of the lobbyists and professionals were not fully translated within the legislative framework. Although everybody agreed that the diploma requirement was the optimal way to protect the title and profession of the architect for instance, the wish of S.C.A.B. to establish one national architectural school was dismissed. The legislators considered the existing educational system sufficient to guarantee well-trained individuals. Another element in the argumentation of S.C.A.B. that was also not withheld, was the request for a monopoly of trained architects on the title, as the law left room for engineers to continue to act as designer for mayor building projects and structures for which an engineer was required. This related to the recurring question on whether the architect was first and foremost an artist. None of the 12 articles however explicitly mention what kind of artistic principles buildings should honour, nor which artistic qualities architects needed to demonstrate. This resulted in multiple profiles, also for architects, like: architecte-de-la-façade, architecte-artiste, architecte-en-chef, etc. Yet also engineering profiles were diversified: ingénieur-conseil, ingénieur-calcul, etc.54

In addition, general contractors started to emerge and develop in this period and professionalized at a fast pace, all adding to an ever complex division of roles.

Even after 1939 the law continued to be criticised. Also after the installation of the Order of Architects in 1963, a counter-movement of architects re-emerged. While the Order celebrates its 60th anniversary this year (2023), the entire legislative framework is again under discussion.

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