

# Between Art and Engineering: A Short History of Built Environment Education in Hamburg from 1767 to 1970

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## The Two Sides of Built Environment Education

The HafenCity University is also known as the University of the Built Environment and Metropolitan Development; in German, this second name<sup>1</sup> contains the handsome, old word, *Baukunst* (architecture, or literally, building art). This is conspicuous; for unlike today, in the nineteenth century it was a more familiar word and in common usage. A lexicon<sup>2</sup> from the time states, “*Baukunst* is at once a science and an art, or rather an application of various scientific insights and artistic skills....” (Ersch and Gruber 1818, p. 109). Building and art found mention in one breath. They went hand in hand, although they were divided into scientific—one could add natural and techno-scientific—and artistic sides.

In the course of the last 200 years, it seems as if architecture’s two sides have become increasingly distanced from one

<sup>1</sup> Universität für Baukunst und Metropolenentwicklung.

<sup>2</sup> The *Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste* was the first major German encyclopedia.

another: on one side the technically trained civil engineer and surveyor, on the other the visual arts inclined architect; on one side the pragmatic organizer of the construction process, on the other the creative designer. By the same token, educational paths in the construction trades split, standing in stiff competition to one another. In Hamburg, this was especially evident after the Second World War. The history of industrial vocational training, of which the construction trades have long been a part, has not been adequately researched. The following contribution offers a brief overview of its development from its beginnings to 1970, chronicling thoroughly in some places and incompletely in others. It is dedicated to both educational institutions in Hamburg, the predecessors of HafenCity University, which attended to architecture in different ways.<sup>3</sup> Its beginnings date back to 1767 and are connected to the Patriotic Society.

3 *Kunstgewerbeschule* and institutions formerly known as *Bauschule*. Therefore, the history of the building industry training program at the present-day HAW Hamburg (formerly Fachhochschule Hamburg) as of 1970 is not part of this historical reflection.

4 Originally founded as the “Society for the Advancement of Manufacturing, the Arts, and Practical Trades,” the shorter name, Patriotic Society, quickly gained currency.

### **Enlightenment, Education, Competition: Roots in the Private Schools of the Patriotic Society**

Founded in 1765, the Patriotic Society<sup>4</sup> was an association of Hamburg bourgeois who felt bound to Enlightenment values and the welfare of their city (Schambach 2004). It was a small group of eminent and learned men, including senators and mayors. Meetings were held in private, where the men discussed the weal and woe of the city, making public proposals for solutions to pending problems (see figure 1).

In the Patriotic Society’s view, a lack of ability and quality awareness in local trades were among Hamburg’s problems and

**Figure 1:** Haus der Patriotischen Gesellschaft, Trostbrücke, © Staatsarchiv Hamburg



they reduced the competitiveness of products made in the city. In affluent circles, furniture made in Hamburg was far less sought after than furniture made in England. The negative reaction did not pertain exclusively to furniture makers, but also bricklayers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and others. This situation led the Patriotic Society to reflect on measures for the advancement of the arts, manufacturing, and practical trades (see figure 2).

To this end, the society took the first step by starting an architectural drawing school for prospective tradesmen. Under the tutelage of a master builder, at the school—which was the teacher’s apartment—twelve students initially learned to draw architectural plans free of charge for three hours a week. The school was intended to operate as a supplement to manual skill trainings by the guilds.

Alongside the trade specialist Johann Georg Büsch (1728–1800), Ernst Georg Sonnin (1713–1794) played the largest role in establishing the school. Sonnin, who rebuilt St. Michael’s Church (it had been destroyed in a fire in 1750), must have noticed that of the master builders of his time, “under 100 there was hardly one for whom the equilibrium of a structure came into question” (Sonnin 1775, quoted in Heckmann 1992, p. 27). It seemed necessary to familiarize the craftsmen involved in construction—carpenters, masons, joiners, carvers, blacksmiths—with the fundamentals of building. In 1770, a second department was added to the school to teach students Freehand Drawing and later *Dekorationszeichnen* (decorative art drawing). The painter Johann Anton Tischbein (1720–1784) was headmaster until 1774 (Günther 1792, 57).<sup>5</sup> The school made good progress over the years: the number of weekly class hours increased, as did the number of classes. In 1797, there were sixty students and three classes: Architectural Drawing, Decorative Art Drawing, and Freehand Drawing (*Verhandlungen und Schriften* 6 1801, pp. 15, 88). At the time, the population of Hamburg was 130,000 (Schambach 2004, 24).<sup>6</sup>

For some novices, “the drawing school”—the umbrella name for all three classes since 1797—launched their career paths. One example is Johann August Arens (1757–1806), one of the school’s former students (Meyer-Oberist 1925, p. 15). After years of study in Göttingen and Copenhagen, he traveled to France, England, and Italy with the support of the Patriotic Society. By 1790 he was working in Hamburg, building Caspar Voght’s country home in Flottbek, among other structures, and became one of Hamburg’s most important classical master builders (Wietek 1953, p. 346).



Figure 2: Ernst Georg Sonnin,  
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5 Hermann Heckmann has identified the true roots of today’s University of Fine Arts (HfBK) in the Schule für Freihandzeichnungen, founded in 1770. See Heckmann 1992, p. 26.

6 The data refers to Hamburg and the suburb St. Pauli und St. Georg.



Figure 3: Carl Ludwig Wimmel,  
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Alexis de Chateaufeuf (1799–1853), whose family came to Hamburg from France, is another example. He learned the trade of carpentry and attended the Patriotic Society’s drawing school. After a short stay in Paris, he trained in architecture for three years under Friedrich Weinbrenner (1766–1826) in Karlsruhe, ultimately returning to Hamburg in 1821/22. After the Great Fire in 1842, Chateaufeuf assumed a central role in Hamburg’s reconstruction, leaving his mark on the city center, noticeable today in the Alsterarkaden and the Alte Post (Meyer-Oberist 1925, p. 20; Klemm 2008, pp. 72–73).

Carl Ludwig Wimmel (1786–1845) is the last example. Hailing from a family of Berlin stonemasons, he also learned the carpentry trade and attended the drawing school (Hipp 2015). The Patriotic Society granted him study trips to Karlsruhe and Paris, as well as a four-year journey through Italy. Back in Hamburg, he entered civil service as a public official in the building authority. As a “Hamburg city architect” (*ibid.*), he influenced the cityscape in the years leading up to the Great Fire of 1842—for instance, in his creation of the elegant Esplanade and the Neuer Jungfernstieg (see figure 3).

The early nineteenth-century generation of Hamburg master builders was still strongly rooted in skilled crafts and trades, in the complementary instruction at the drawing school, and in other extensive educational settings and travels. The local Patriotic Society gained merit by recognizing and purposefully cultivating the talent of young men from the skilled trades workforce, as the aforementioned examples suggest. It backed and encouraged their professional and social advancement.

The educational trajectories of later generations of leading Hamburg building officers—such as Carl J. C. Zimmermann (1831–1911),<sup>7</sup> Franz Andreas Meyer (1837–1901), and Fritz Schumacher (1869–1947)—demonstrate that throughout the nineteenth century, the foundation in craft increasingly receded behind academic training completed in Munich, Berlin, or Hannover and not in Hamburg due to the local state of affairs.

The Patriotic Society did not confine itself to the drawing school. As of 1790, technological courses were being offered in the winter; in these courses local craftsmen *could* acquaint themselves with the basics of mathematics, technology, mechanics, natural history, and chemistry (*Verhandlungen und Schriften 1* 1792, pp. 140–44; 2 1793, p. 273). These courses, each four hours per week, enjoyed great popularity. The Patriotic Society reports indicated 250 to 400 participants in the late seventeen-nineties (*Verhandlungen und Schriften 6* 1801, p. 91). Most were skilled construction workers—that is, carpen-

7 For a discussion on Zimmermann, see Schilling (2006, pp. 426–28); for Meyer, see Hipp (2010, pp. 258–60); for Schumacher, see Fischer (2003, pp. 388–90).

ters, joiners, and masons (ibid.). Nevertheless, these courses were only offered until 1813 (Meyer-Oberist 1925, p. 40).

The drawing school, however, existed for many years. In 1844, a fourth class (Architectural Ornament) was added to the three established classes (Architectural Drawing, Decorative Art, and Free-hand Drawing) and was taught by the Hamburg painter, Martin Gensler (1811–1881) (ibid., p. 44).<sup>8</sup> Further, there was a Tear Art (*Reißkunst*) class and a mathematics class in two sections. There were 182 students overall (*Jahresbericht* 1843, pp. 184–185). The drawing school and technological courses aimed for breadth in craft training. Their goal was both economic—raising the overall competitiveness of skilled crafts and trades and improving the quality of craftsmanship—and aesthetic, as spelled out in 1790:

However, it is not the primary purpose of this society, nor of its schools, to train artists, it rather directs its utmost attention to becoming locally utilitarian. It intends to give our craftsmen and their works more determination, more taste, in order to attain not grandeur and exaltation, but elegance and appeal. And part of this is the understanding of right proportion, indispensable for every craftsman. (Günther 1792, p. 58)

With the establishment and expansion of its schools, the Patriotic Society followed a need, or more precisely, an imperative of the time. At the same time, the society questioned the reasons for perceived shortcomings. In their view, one of these was that “the fervor for training the craftsman class” (*Verhandlungen und Schriften* 2 1793, p. 268) was all but extinguished. Prejudices against innovation and widespread inefficiency were other reasons. The society sought to counter this through practical elucidation, which meant education.

The Patriotic Society attributed the actual reason behind these daily nuisances to the guilds’ rigid manner of conducting business<sup>9</sup> and mandatory guild membership. Many trades—including those of fitters, joiners, and masons—could only be practiced by the guilds. To safeguard the guild from competition, the number of masters and fellow guild members was limited and for foreign fellows the access to the labor market was often hindered.

In 1792 the Patriotic Society expressed skepticism in a comprehensive assessment of the guilds: “the certainty of making a living fosters inertia and poorer work, which finds defense in the self-preserving group mentality of the guild” (*Verhandlungen und Schriften* 3 1795, p. 171). The guild system was limiting to some of its

8 Also see *Jahresbericht* 1843, pp. 184–85.

9 In Hamburg and other north German cities they were called “authorities” (*Ämter*). I continue to use the term “guilds”, because the Patriotic Society generally used it in its bulletins.