

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the organisational structure and management practice of Irish architectural firms who export to remote, low cost markets. It profiles the current position of these firms in terms of both their operational practices and their human and financial resources. It then assesses that profile in the context of the global architectural market.

Following a literature review and development of a theoretical internationalisation model for Irish architectural exporters, the research explores the position of the participant firms by way of a self administered survey and selected follow up interviews. Two further interviews are then carried out with representatives of Enterprise Ireland (the Irish government export agency) and the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland (the Irish architectural representative body).

The research demonstrates that Irish firms are at a competitive disadvantage to their international counterparts in terms of both their resources and their international operational experience. It also highlights how limited formal business management training among architects has led to firms lacking the commercial expertise required to successfully grow in a competitive international marketplace.

Based on these findings, the research concludes that firms should maintain a presence in a range of geographically distinct markets but centre their design operations in Ireland. By focusing on the design stage as the primary offering firms then can maximise their resources through the economies of scale that such an arrangement affords.

It also concludes that consolidation within the sector would enhance the collective competitive position of Irish architectural exporters in the global marketplace by increasing the availability of human and financial resources.

Finally, the research recommends the up-skilling of architects through specialisation at undergraduate level and post graduate CPD, supplemented by the acquisition of expertise through the appointment of key personnel with relevant commercial backgrounds such as marketing or finance.

Keywords for this research are; Architecture, Internationalisation strategies, Soft capital management, Organisational structure, Management practice, Professional services marketing, Services exporting, Market entry modes.