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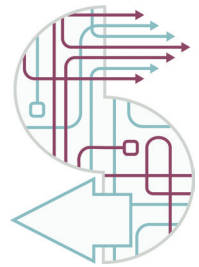
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**research
concepts
applicable in
architectural
studies**

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INTRODUCTION

The identity of a space can be translated through the totality of the uncovered human and non-human elements, through the vast network of inter- and intraspatial relationships, through spatial symbols and practices, through the action of internal as well as external factors. These inscribed elements create different narratives of the space, which the (future) architect has the obligation to know and decipher.

Research is a means of expanding the universe of “common knowledge” and, at the same time, a modality of generating contextual information, based on facts. It is recommended that the domain-specific theory should be complemented by critically-informed research founded on well-mastered methods and techniques.

Serious consideration of the various contextual purposes of any research project will inevitably entail a set of interconnected questions. Among the most important questions are: (1) What is the motivation for this research? (2) Who is the audience for the study? and (3) What is the potential or intended impact of this research once it is completed? (Groat & Wang, 2013, p. 103)

Well-designed research is adapted to the purpose, time and money resources as well as to the short, medium and long-term objectives. It may aim at the analysis of certain aspects or phenomena, of the evolution of phenomena over time, at an analysis of the relationships between simultaneous phenomena, etc., or at combinations of the above. In addition, it is possible to rely on quantitative or qualitative research, with a variety of methods and techniques available for use. Each method and combination of methods has advantages and disadvantages; it is up to the researcher to identify the appropriate option.

Often, the built form is evaluated based on its aesthetics and its functionality – attributes that are easy to see and understand. The true value of the built form, however, is the knowledge that informs the design response. That knowledge is less obvious than aesthetics and functionality but is likely more instrumental in creating an outcome that is aligned with the desired goals for the project. (Augustin & Coleman, 2012, p. xxvii)

QUANTITATIVE VERSUS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH identifies the general laws and empirical regularities. It presupposes numerous analysed cases, from which the researcher is detached. It has the advantage of being an objective strategy through which hypotheses can be tested and which allows generalisation beyond the obtained sample. Statistical analyses entail a series of very strict rules to ensure accuracy. Yet quantitative research treats certain aspects superficially and responds to the questions *How? Who? In what way?* rather than *Why?*, giving less attention to social meanings and failing to consider individual characteristics.

Keywords: numerical values, statistical tests, generalisation

Methods: questionnaire, survey, census, territorial statistics, data analysis

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH aims to discover meanings and the individual's point of view; it takes into account the complexity of human actions, criticises linear thinking and answers the *Why?* question. Qualitative research entails thematic analyses of a relatively small number of cases and a focus on interactive processes. The researcher is involved and authenticity is paramount. The main disadvantages are linked to the situational constraints that can interfere with the research and to the ample time allocated.

Keywords: specific context, subjective meanings, direct interaction

Methods: observation, interview, case studies, life story, photo/video materials, focus groups, biography, phenomenological studies

RESEARCH METHODS

There is no single correct manner of using research techniques and tools, just as there is no predetermined recipe. The researcher can use many sources, from official statistics to oral histories, depending on the studied context. Bibliographical research is almost always indispensable in any type of research. Observation and mapping are basic instruments of architectural research. The methods that require direct interaction (like the interview and the questionnaire, but also certain types of maps) can be used with different respondent categories, from the users of a space to experts in particular fields. Different or combined research methods can be applied depending on the purpose.

We subsequently present a few of the research methods employed in architecture, with the recommendation that they, in their turn, should be studied in detail by accessing the dedicated resources. Books like *The Designer's Guide to Doing Research: Applying Knowledge to Inform Design* (Augustin & Coleman, 2012) explain at length the usefulness of applying particular methods in professions such as architecture as well as correct modes of application, limitations and recommendations.

Bibliographical research. Academic bibliographical research applicable, but not limited to, the university context, relies on the documentation of already available resources on a given theme, such as: academic books and articles from the fields of architecture, history, sociology, anthropology, urban planning, human geography, etc., but also from fields related to the programme; studies that target the analysed context or the identified actors, as well as photo and film archives, documents, newspaper articles,

community forums, sociological data analysis, contextualised case studies, memoirs, monographs and diaries. The contribution of good research is finding the information that opens up the horizon of knowledge in relation to the proposed objective. The sources must be ranked on the basis of their degree of relevance and of their credibility. In addition, the novelty of the source is not an imperative, yet a good study is expected to also contain contemporary sources. The clear dissociation between academic sources (specialised books, articles, etc.) and popular sources (Facebook groups, sites, forums, blogs) constitutes a key element. Bibliographical research is often of the snowball type: the references used by an author in a work that contains useful information can be consulted to acquire deeper understanding.

Bibliographical research must track a wide range of sources that cover the need for information. For example, in historical research, the documents that can be examined are:

_ successive historical plans of the settlement that the building is part of, in order to identify the evolution of its relationship with the settlement, and of the plot divisions, the stages of construction, the relationship to the surrounding neighbourhood and elements of place identity. Specifically, through stratigraphic analysis, it is possible to understand a particular development, to date more precisely the information that appears on an urban plan: elements of toponymy, topography, plot dimensions, vegetation, building category, numbering, function, building shape, etc., but also the character of the place at different historical stages.

_ archival documents: alignment plans, building permits, letters, information about the property, the original drawings of the building, publications of the time in which it is mentioned – monographs, newspapers, annuals, telephone catalogues, photographs, etc.

_ recent primary and secondary bibliographies that deal with the settlement, the building or the architectural programme, directly or indirectly – monographs, albums, research articles, etc.

_ webographies (if available), based on the same criteria. If the site or the building is of greater significance, the additional consultation of the large online archives, national or international, is advisable (e.g. unique plans and historical documents related to Bucharest can be consulted free of charge on the site of the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*).

_ collections (physical or digital) of any items that contain relevant information – postcards, posters, photographs of the time, etc.

These documentary items must be related to the theme, the complexity of the project and the time that can be allocated to research. On the basis of these, it is possible to formulate an intervention hypothesis and to argue for a particular project position.

Participatory observation entails the researcher's active participation (to a greater or lesser extent) in the studied activities or those unfolding in the studied field, immersion in the researched context, undergoing the same experiences and engagement in informal discussions. The researcher's involvement can increase the community's trust in them; it can contribute to the discovery of otherwise inaccessible aspects and thus to a better understanding of the community or of the studied phenomena. It is

important that the researcher should conform to the standards and norms of the studied community while nevertheless keeping the distance required for observation (according to the set purpose and the position they assume – that of an individual within or outside the researched community).

Non-participatory observation entails merely watching or listening (without implicitly participating in activities) and impartiality (no opinions should be formed nor value judgements formulated).

Observe without forming opinions – be a sponge. (Augustin & Coleman, 2012, p. 203)

Observation can be exploratory (i.e., attempt to identify possible criteria that will lay the foundations of the subsequent analysis), or it can obey clear, pre-established criteria, in which case the emphasis lies on correctly relating the criteria to the moments when the research is conducted (for example, observing the activities in a market only at a specific hour does not provide a complete image of its use, which can differ depending on the time, day, weather conditions, season, etc.).

Mapping is a frequently employed method of architectural research. It may consist, for example, in:

_the creation of cognitive/mental maps – the respondents' graphical representations, based on a requirement clearly formulated by the researcher;

_behavioural mapping – which illustrates user behaviours closely linked to the researched space;

_annotated plans – plans on which annotations and various observations are made, depending on the study topic.

This method is especially diverse and can consist of drawing sketches, plans or even new maps, using tracking applications or specialised platforms, or relying on existing maps on which the subjects can mark trajectories, reference points, etc., or on which the researcher can intervene by highlighting the points of interest, etc.

Types of representation like the above can contribute to the understanding of aspects such as: how people move through the city or through a space, where they stop, which are their main points of reference, which are the main routes, how they perceive spatiality and distances, which zones are the most frequented ones, all of these leading to the identification of the optimal spaces for intervention, in line with existing flows.

The questionnaire is a means of collecting data on a large scale, useful especially in determining (possibly on a percentage basis) the respondents' attitudes in relation to the problem raised as well as in determining the degree of appreciation for certain elements and phenomena on the basis of specific criteria, etc. The formulated questions need to be clear, precise, written in a language characteristic of the respondents. In designing a questionnaire, the emphasis lies on the correct formulation of questions and their logical succession. The answers obtained from the questionnaire can be compared, correlated, divided into categories, the relationships between the set variables can be examined, etc.

The interview. Albeit also based on generating answers to questions (not necessarily predefined ones in this case), the interview has the advantage of allowing the interviewer to adapt the questions to the subject's answers,

to observe non-verbal signals and to obtain spontaneous answers. It thus allows for the exploration of the studied topic in greater depth, provided the questions are correctly formulated since in this case the greatest risk is that of obtaining insincere answers due to phrasing that indicates the expected/ desired answer.

The interview can be conducted in a more or less formal fashion. The walk-and-talk interview, where the respondent is accompanied along a route, can be considered to belong to the informal type.

The case study. The selection of case studies must be based on clear criteria for the results to be relevant to the research. The most important criteria include: the similarity with the studied programme or functions, the scale of the architectural object, contextual correspondence, etc.

[T]he case study involves studying a case in relation to the complex dynamics with which it intersects and from which the case itself is inseparable. (Groat & Wang, 2013, p. 421)

Case studies can contribute to the in-depth understanding of the manner in which an architectural object (through its characteristics) and/or its associated programme function in relation to other elements and/or to the context, to the identification of specific solutions by observing their impact, to the discovery of the perceptions they lead to, of the manner in which they have been adopted by the community, etc.



Fig. 5. Inner-City Arts Campus, Los Angeles, US – Michael Maltzan Architecture
(c) Iwan Baan <https://iwan.com/portfolio/michael-maltzan-inner-city-arts-los-angeles>

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