

# PARTICIPATIONAL ATMOSPHERE

**TO WHAT EXTEND CAN A STUDY IN PRAXEOLOGY CONTRIBUTE TO THE CONNECTION OF  
PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION WITH ARCHITECTURE?**

Essay for Lectures on Research Methods  
Else Dekker | 4213955  
06/12/2018

## INTRODUCTION

Within the practice of architectural design, all projects cannot exist before a proper research is done on beforehand. This research is in my opinion often labelled as something just to do quickly before starting with the design. However, during the whole design phase lots of research is happening, which is often not very structured. Without knowing what your research goal is, you cannot do effective research. We have been told in the Lectures Series on Research Methodology, that a methodology can help yourself narrowing down the topic and approach of the research, to have a more sufficient research process.

Also, as Ray Lucas said in his book about research methods in architecture, in order to have progress in architecture, we must continue doing research into history, the social aspects and theory.<sup>1</sup> Only then architecture could develop itself over time.

With the lecture series on Research Methods, I gained insight into the deeper thought of doing research. Learning about which methods are used in architectural research made me look into the ways of doing research and especially how this could structure the process. In a way, it opened my eyes that the methods and the research itself are closely interlinked with each other. If one is reading into a research topic through papers and books, often the methods of that research are mentioned too, and one can reflect on these methods. In which the researcher, or in the case of architecture the designer, could substantiate his/her own research concept with the right values.

For which the studio architectural engineering has a broad approach on research topics, different methodologies are applied. However, with the visiting professor Kasper Jensen guiding us in a special curriculum for graduation on the topic of upcycling the Amstel III area in Amsterdam, the research was split into two parts. First, a booklet was made in a group of five about circular economy in Amstel III, secondly, our own fascination within this topic was expanded to work on towards our goals for the P5. The research of the booklet was more specific on how to implement a circular economy in the built environment, and especially in our case study Amstel III. The booklet was published at the circular symposium and given at several visitors and stakeholders, (developers, researchers and the municipality), which will have a part in transforming the area. The individual fascination worked further on the research into circular economy, where thought about how to implement these strategies in real life and how people could connect to the circular economy with active participation, where experience and atmosphere come together. My research question became to get to know to what extent reused materials give a different atmosphere to the used architectural space, where the atmosphere should be an informative, cultural and connected place. As for this question the user is very important, however, atmosphere is difficult to analyze as it is something personal, vague and ephemeral and difficult to capture in text and design.<sup>2</sup> Atmosphere is part of the common sense, where knowledge and experience is embedded in a larger community.

## RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

As for the implication of Circular Economy, there's a need to get it rolling and be enhanced by everybody to make it work, where the 'everybody' can be seen as the common. An atmosphere is part of what can be called common sense of perceiving, the knowledge and experience of it is embedded in a larger community, able to be shared and exchanged. One cannot simplify the way an atmosphere is seen; multiple viewpoints are needed. By researching different attitudes towards circularity of multiple different viewpoints a clear perspective is given about how the common look at the topic. At this principle praxeology in the research would help the formulation of the adaptability of people (the common) in the area on circular economy. As praxeology stands for the thought on examining how people/users are going to use the space one will or did design, it is consistent with the research about how the circular economy could be adapted by society, specifically in Amstel III. As mentioned by Marieke Berkers in the lecture of Praxeology is by studying the praxis of architecture one can develop an eye for the actual users of the building. This is highly important for the implementation of the circular concept. As circular economy does not work if one chain of the circle is not committed to the principle, all the users of all the buildings need to know about and adapt to these principles. A praxeological approach is suitable in this research as the end result will lead towards an embedded design.

On the other hand, the connecting of people to the principle of circular economy by its reused materials could also be seen as part of the concept of phenomenology, as the materials will inform an atmosphere and how the users will relate to that.<sup>3</sup> Atmospheres will have a saying in the experiences of the humans being in that specific space. With the phenomenological side of the research a viewpoint could be made to look into the needs of the users, for as our architectural emotion is bound to our former experiences.<sup>4</sup>

In exploring the need for the adaptability to circular economy it is essential to get notice of what the society its wishes are or would be willing to adapt to. Pierre Bourdieu has described the study of actions of anthropology as the representation of what the observer notices while observing the action from above and from a distanced point of view. In that way, the observer could reduce all social relations to communicative relations and decoding operations to come to conclusions for the architectural practice.<sup>5</sup> This is highly relevant at this stage of the development towards a circular economy. To get to know what the citizens want in their daily lives, but also implementing a sustainable solution for our current way of depleting the environmental health, a hands-on approach to be applied directly at social level is necessary in order to make a change. As seen in the writings of Pallasmaa and Zumthor an approach to design for what will be needed in the future can be developed through intensive exploration of environment/atmosphere and materials. As Pallasmaa speaks about the embodied image where people relate to in a space, the narrative will inform the people on circularity, while a praxeology study will inform how to let this narrative be adapted to the people. As Lucas mentioned is that "how we build is informed by how we understand the world, and how we understand the world is framed by what we have built there."<sup>6</sup> Therefore in this research, the praxeology cannot be optimized without the phenomenology support it.

## RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The theory of practice (praxeology) questions the theoretical and social conditions which made possible by unfolding the science of the social world against the presuppositions of practical knowledge of the social world.<sup>7</sup> Which can be said as a theoretical approach on examining the social lives of citizens and how they look at and inhabit architecture. This evolution started to take a lead around the post-war area. Before, the Modern architect had the moral authority as form giver, creator and controller of the human environment without giving their interventions any doubt.<sup>8</sup> As Douglas Haskell stated in 1958, people/inhabitants were attacked by the novelty of those Modern architectural designs. In the new period it was crucial for the architect to accommodate the desire of the masses in its design.<sup>9</sup>

After the second world war, architects were noticing the users of their designed buildings, how they behave in their built environment. The people, or the common, became more important in the architectural context and designers came to think how we, the common, use the space around us. In 1953 GAMMA, Groupe d'Architects Modernes Marocains, came to show on the CIAM in France that it was valuable to look at the societal challenges of the (urban) design of the North African grid areas. It was an essence to rethink architecture, not only should architecture learn from the everyday workers' culture, but it should also acculturate it fully.<sup>10</sup> An active role was adopted by the architects to design for the common, looking at the behaviour of society and how this could influence the new designs. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown were working towards the same approaches. They embraced the problem of designing for the people and envisaged mass culture as new a symbolic for the development of architecture.<sup>11</sup> With these new statements, the architects took their cue from the needs of future users. As both Peter Zumthor and Juhani Pallasmaa in later years took on their design motives.<sup>12</sup> They were looking at the history [of society] is a good thing for human beings, without, we would feel alienated and displaced. History provides ground to stand on and work further.<sup>13</sup> Praxeology takes all what has happened and what trends are to evolve this into applied architecture for the (urban) design, so the mass could identify and accept this new architecture as their place of existence.

As an aspect of reality; the physical object is more important than the conceptual thought of it.<sup>14</sup> If people aren't aware that the building, the materials or the surrounding is real, the architecture wouldn't encounter on the users. The awareness of the building mostly lies in the atmospheres at the work of Zumthor and Pallasmaa. As atmosphere exists where architecture is connected with the surpassing of daily use,<sup>15</sup> the designer must get knowledge of the daily behaviour of people to understand them and be able to apply. Therefore, the observer needs to make him-/herself alien to these people, be an observer from above to notice without any obstacles of his own principles.<sup>16</sup>

As for praxeology, the role of the user in the building is an important consideration in the design process of the architect. Therefore, to study the usage and the users on forehand will give insight into the type of users. There are two types of users, a reactive and a creative user of the building. Reactive users will modify the physical characteristics of a space when it needs to change conform their wishes, therefore they will choose from a narrow and predictable range of configurations, largely defined by the architect. The creative user, on the other hand, creates a new space or gives existing ones a new meaning and with that establishes a new behaviour of the space.<sup>17</sup> To engage users to take in the circular principle the architect should design for its changing flexibility. Architects should enhance this, as DeGory said, the exchange value of the built environment will increase if you design with the flexibility.<sup>18</sup> The design for flexibility will be valuable when looking at the circular economy. Materials are scarce and society changes fast, flexibility in this case stands for the adaptability after its first use, for the changing needs of the common. Therefore, the role of the architects evolves to more of a social and political one, where dialogue with the users is an important communication factor for architecture.

## POSITIONING

As said in the lecture by Marieke Berkers, “by studying the praxis of architecture, one can develop an eye for the actual users of the building, and not the imagined ones”.<sup>19</sup> In my position of the graduation studio with the circular economy as principle I can completely relate to this by the need to look at the actual users before designing the architecture which will be given to them. Users are usually an unpredictable threat to architects, as their ability to transform building and spaces after the hand of the architects are off the projects. This let the architect question the perception of themselves as the authors of architecture.<sup>20</sup> But the question is if this is only a threat if the architect him-/herself thinks of the design as an established design, not willing to change. On the other hand, with the praxeology method in mind, one can say that the architect is also able to design buildings where the users can easily adapt their wishes, where the transformation of the architecture is an architectural language in itself. Therefore, one can question itself if it's really the established architectural language he/she wants or de system of adaptability in space. Where the role of the architect becomes more and more a designer for the users' wishes, an architect of the commons. In that way, the thoughts of the architects will exist in the architecture of adaptation, while the building itself can adapt to the changing needs of time. In this case, the architects appear as being the activist, he/she can use professional skills to represent a disempowered community and resist oppressive forces.<sup>21</sup> As Peter Zumthor puts it, it is the task of the architect to address, by means of the building, the interaction between people and object.<sup>22</sup>

As to prevail upon the users of the building, there needs to be an extra tool in order to make them aware of their own being in the building, to make the people more aware of it. Therefore, the most powerful architectural experiences are embodied images.<sup>23</sup> Those are the storytellers of what the architects mean towards the users of the building. In order to get the mass to know about circularity, they need to learn about it. With only the architect knowing how the mass will reacts is not enough, the mass itself need to change their habit. At this point, the phenomenological point of view comes in. First, the knowledge of the actions of people need to be gathered to know which way to go with the design, the praxeology. Only with the phenomenological approach, these values can be prevailed to the users, in which they can all change to the circular principles and act towards it. Architects need to empathize with users, clients and other perceivers of architecture, only then with compassion the architect is able to build atmosphere.<sup>24</sup> And only with the compassion of the atmosphere, the users can experience the atmosphere.

“The experience of a building depends on the way it is managed as well as designed” states Foucault.<sup>25</sup> An architect cannot influence the users of his/her building without providing a well-considered experience for its users. Where the experience is not only a thing to perceive, but also to use. This usage could be seen as either a physical transformation, such as moving walls or furniture, which will be a flexible building or by inhabiting by interaction between user and object.<sup>26</sup> To get to this well managed and designed experience, the architect must be conscious of the social transitions in society, as for the architect always designs for future use. Where the architect can gather knowledge with praxeology. However, to implement these thoughts into the design, the architect needs phenomenology to bring the message he/she saw in the trends of society to the awareness of the common.

Without knowing where one builds for, you cannot truly connect your design to the future inhabitants of it. In order to make it fit in the context, and the future context, research needs to be done into not only the wishes of people but also the needs of a whole, changing, society. When looking at how to connect people/users of a building to a specific subject in architecture, as two-sided research has shown the way what the people/society wants and how you, as architect, can show these wishes at an active manner to the users of the building. The new role of the architect will be an active one, where he/she sees the needs of the common and acts in his/her design to it.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- <sup>1</sup> Ray Lucas, *Research Methods for Architecture* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 1988), 7.
- <sup>2</sup> Klaske Havik, Hans Teerds and Gus Tielens, *Building atmospheres*, (editorial of Oase #91, 2013) 3
- <sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge, University Press, 1977) 3
- <sup>4</sup> Klaske Havik and Gus Tielens, *Atmosphere, Compassion and Embodied Experience A conversation about Atmosphere with Juhani Pallasmaa*, (NAi uitgevers, Oase #91)
- <sup>5</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge, University Press, 1977) 1
- <sup>6</sup> Ray Lucas, *Research Methods for Architecture* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 1988), p.8
- <sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge, University Press, 1977) 4
- <sup>8</sup> R. Banham *Age of the Masters: A Personal View of Modern Architecture* (London: Architectural Press, 1975) 5
- <sup>9</sup> Douglas Haskell, *Architecture and Popular Taste*, (Architectural Forum 111, no.2, 1958), 105
- <sup>10</sup> Tom Avermeate, *The Architect and the Public: Empowering People in Post war Architecture Culture*, (Hunch the Berlage Report on Architecture, Urbanism and Landscape #14, 2010), 52.
- <sup>11</sup> Tom Avermeate, *The Architect and the Public: Empowering People in Post war Architecture Culture*, (Hunch the Berlage Report on Architecture, Urbanism and Landscape #14, 2010), 54
- <sup>12</sup> Gernot Böhme, *Encountering Atmospheres A Reflection on the Concept of Atmosphere in the Work of Juhani Pallasmaa and Peter Zumthor*, (NAi uitgevers, Oase #91, 2013)
- <sup>13</sup> Klaske Havik and Gus Tielens, *Concentrated Confidence A visit to Peter Zumthor*, (NAi uitgevers, Oase #91) 63
- <sup>14</sup> Klaske Havik and Gus Tielens, *Concentrated Confidence A visit to Peter Zumthor*, (NAi uitgevers, Oase #91) 59
- <sup>15</sup> Klaske Havik, Hans Teerds and Gus Tielens, *Building atmospheres*, (editorial of Oase #91, 2013) 3
- <sup>16</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1988) 93
- <sup>17</sup> Jonathan Hill, *The Use of Architects* (Urban Studies, vol.38, No. 2, 2001) 355
- <sup>18</sup> E. DeGory, *A potential for flexibility*, (MSc Thesis, University College London, 1998) 16
- <sup>19</sup> Lecture about praxeology from Marieke Berkers in Lecture Series on Research Methods
- <sup>20</sup> Jonathan Hill, *The Use of Architects* (Urban Studies, vol.38, No. 2, 2001) 352
- <sup>21</sup> Tom Avermeate, *The Architect and the Public: Empowering People in Post war Architecture Culture*, (Hunch the Berlage Report on Architecture, Urbanism and Landscape #14, 2010), 56
- <sup>22</sup> Klaske Havik and Gus Tielens, *Concentrated Confidence A visit to Peter Zumthor*, (NAi uitgevers, Oase #91) 71
- <sup>23</sup> Klaske Havik and Gus Tielens, *Atmosphere, Compassion and Embodied Experience A conversation about Atmosphere with Juhani Pallasmaa*, (NAi uitgevers, Oase #91)
- <sup>24</sup> Klaske Havik, Hans Teerds and Gus Tielens, *Building atmospheres*, (editorial of Oase #91, 2013)
- <sup>25</sup> Jonathan Hill, *The Use of Architects* (Urban Studies, vol.38, No. 2, 2001) 357
- <sup>26</sup> Jonathan Hill, *The Use of Architects* (Urban Studies, vol.38, No. 2, 2001) summary