

RESEARCH METHODS ANALYSIS

The role of Praxeology and Sociology in Research Process

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Thesis "Sport and social integration: Bridging and bonding social capital"

I INTRODUCTION

As far as I am concerned, researching is always an essential part of an integral architectural design. As a coherent and logical architectural project, the concept leading the design process should have a solid relationship with researches, which can be conducted in various aspects, such as human, environment, history, culture, technology etc. The key point is the research must be involved in holistic architectural creation instead of only initial context research. Based on this lecture series, the most important I learned is that analyzing one architecture or landscape project is not only the outcome, more importantly is the methodological research and the intricate background story behind it. Different methodological approach can result in different outcomes. Just like what mentioned in Klaske Havik's paper: Acts of Symbiosis, the resonances between the work of Alvar Aalto and Rogelio Salmona goes beyond similar materials and geometries but rather the humanism concern behind them. ¹ This lecture series introduced different research methods and different topics deserving concern. What inspired me most is the theme in Marieke Berkers' presentation: Praxeology, which is a subject concerning human actions in different situations. ² Different conditions such as environment difference, cultural characters can lead to different activities. Understanding praxeology can contribute to a better comprehension of people's response to and a systematical prediction of a public space. In my graduation studio: Interiors Buildings Cities, the general direction is researching the relationship within people, public space and the city. Investigating the story of anthropology and sociology behind the site can truly help understand inherent requirements of a specific group of people towards public space. In this semester, the theme is called Independent Group, which particularly concerns the agency of citizens within urban conditions, the conditions of their agencies, manifestations of the political within the city, deep sustainability, and realizable architecture that is engaged with these issues. ³ My individual topic is how a sport facility can play a distinctive role in social integration in a multiple culture and ethnic background. As the most culture diversity area in Amsterdam, Indische Buurt is a lively neighborhood with over 100 languages spoken here. However, the interaction between different ethnic seems limited due to different culture, language, educational level and economic level. How can an intimate architecture can engage these minorities with the society? What kinds of activities there should be that different ethnics can really interact to break cultural barriers? Does sport can bridge and bond social capital? In order to answer these questions, understanding the tendency of their favor behaviors and activities is quite necessary. Undoubtedly, different ethnic groups and economic classes have distinctive attitudes towards interactive behaviors. Recognizing their behaviors and psychology indeed can make a great difference in architecture generation. In such a multiple culture context, architecture should be the embodiment of society, human, culture and environment. In order to understand people who will utilize this project, the knowledge of praxeology is necessary. At the same time, for the sake of visualizing social and cultural structure of this neighborhood, sociology is an essential tool to be discussed. These are two main methods I tried to apply in my project.

II RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

As one branch of Interiors Buildings Cities graduation projects, Independent Group is an independent proposition whilst combine with annual concerns of the studio. Starting with my personal interest, I selected the theme SPORT to analysis and research how this type of traditional and special public space can be transformed and reinterpreted today. I first analyzed many sport venues from ancient Greece to contemporary construction and tried to dig out the anthropological and sociological meaning of them. In terms of social and human meaning for historical sports architecture, I have a critical attitude towards them. From ancient Greek amphitheaters to modern Olympic stadiums, this type of building is typically under control of the power. Citizens entering the governed building are usually supervised and administrated by strict regulations. Ordinary life is life put under certain order, usually supported by legislation. To be inside space of administered order is safe but less free. In the case of humanity and sociality, I think sports architecture should not only be intimate to athletes but also the ordinary people. The sport is not only physical activity spent in competition; it should cover all activities which belonged to leisure time. Sport arenas are usually considered as the icon of one area; it should be available for considerable use. However, most Olympic arenas became a desert after a big event.

Large amount of money and labors spent on the construction seems not feasible and worthwhile. Its meaning for society shouldn't be a temporary people gathering place. Regarding its social meaning, European council has a new definition: Sport has a distinctive role to play as a force for social integration, tolerance and understanding. It is open to all, regardless of age, language, religion, culture, or ability. The slogan in 2012 Olympic Games was also conceived as Architecture for Humanity. Hence a sport venue should have a permanent meaning both on human and society. The site Indische Buurt in Amsterdam Oost is famous for its multiple culture and ethnic mixing. However, the social bonding and community cohesion is not tight based on the sociological research. Especially the low-income minority groups feel alienated by middle-class native people. So, the method Praxeology mentioned in Lecture series and the Sociology can truly help me truly understand the inherent requirements of different ethnic groups and the real people can be embraced by a sports architecture.

Epistemic framework of praxeology can be studied as a consideration about human actions in different situations. Researchers are always observers. Studying of praxeology helps an architect understand the beliefs and values of the people who utilize the project. ⁴ An architect must observe the elements of the culture of a people such as their religion and its influence on their lives and their social norms. These cultural elements drive the people's way of life and ultimately influence their choices in relation to the buildings which they inhabit. While Architectural sociology addresses the purpose of architecture as it relates to our society. ⁵ Architectural sociology is the application of social theory and methods to the architectural design process. It provides quantitative and qualitative research tools to anticipate how designs impact people on a variety of levels. ⁶ In practice, architectural sociology builds upon social design theory and uses research methods such as survey research, Internet research, interviewing, field observation, secondary data sources, and unobtrusive measures. Similarly, these two methods both concentrate on humanity. One crucial difference is that praxeology mainly focusses on individual or a small group of people while sociology is more related to a group of people, such as a community, an ethnic group or even a country citizen. Different researching tools can be utilized as a complement for each other. This part will be articulated on the Position part.

III RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Praxeology and sociology both have a long and rich history. The term praxeology was coined and defined "The science of human action" in 1890 by Alfred Espinas, a French social philosopher. ⁷ Since then, research has gradually developed into several main branches, but they have similar beliefs. People believe that human behavior is not a behavior goal, but an accidental behavior and the logic of behavior. Ludwig von Mises subsequently explained behaviorism in the economic context, arguing that action and reason are homogeneous. The reason is the ability to clarify the basic characteristics of behavior through purely rational distribution, which is the result of the fact that behavior is a branch of reason. In this sense, human behavior is objective and universal. The notion that humans engage in intentional behavior shows that they have preferences, so that observation, prediction, and reasoning of human behavior will help test social practice in a multiple cultural area.

In 1925, Le Corbusier developed this method further in urban research. In order to complete the publication 'Urbanisme', a traditional city design concept was put forward. Le Corbusier thought that the current urban configuration was not feasible for settlement and economic development. Therefore, he came up with an interdisciplinary complex city with increased population, developed transportation, more parks and open space. ⁸ This new city model designed by Le Corbusier was based on his knowledge about praxeology, which guided him create an ideal city combined with social, industrial, economic and human factors. It could not be a layout of various possibilities without a profound consideration about society and human. Another reference dominated by praxeology from Le Corbusier is the prominent Unité d'Habitation, which was built to solve the housing crisis in post-war France. This building can be regarded as the typical embodiment for architect's consideration about the relationship between human and living environment. In this project, Le Corbusier first put forward the residential concept of rational layout and multiple functions He tried to create enough green ground and open space for residents to enjoy daylight and nature. The concept "Vertical Garden" was realized in this 18 stories apartment composed with cement boxes. Every unit is open towards the

interior of the building, which was connected vertically by streets. Walls, ceilings and floors of each unit were prefabricated and then put together to existing frames. Enough sound insulation was added to provide privacy. However, it doesn't mean every unit is enclosed. On the contrary, staggered organization between units stimulated interaction among residents. Privacy and interaction were both satisfied while other multiple functions were configured vertically at the same time. This project fully took praxeology into consideration that it broke the traditional residential frame and integrated multiple interactive spaces together with innovate configuration. The main principles behind this can be a paradigm for my project aimed at integrating diverse groups of people together.

Sociology like we mentioned before is more focus on a larger group's social relationship, social interaction and culture that surrounds everyday life. The origin of this subject can be traced back to the time of ancient Greek philosopher Plato. While the surveying method to collect information was initially created in 1086 by philosopher Confucius.⁹ As for architectural sociology, there are no direct clues proving the time of its presence. But literally the developments are parallel and inseparable. One main goal for architecture sociology is to construct the interrelationship between space and identities of one special group. Here I would like to use Dutch architect Aldo Van Eyck's playgrounds as an example. In order to create a real gathering space for children in 1950s and 60s, Dutch Urban Department hired Aldo Van Eyck to design tens of playgrounds in Amsterdam. The playground designed by Aldo Van Eyck can be regarded as a paradigm about reflecting children characteristics and space intimacy. Out of the traditional framework, the playground without any physical boundaries merged perfectly to the city background. In architect's perspective, the public space shouldn't avoid the integration with urban environment. All the urban elements can be valuable parameters to definite the public space. Children's mental characters and beloved activity styles are involved in the project. Children can play reliably in an open space with the witness of their parents sitting on the benches around the edge of playgrounds. Besides, small facilities with bold but simple geometry were applied repeatedly on playgrounds. Aldo van Eyck's humane architecture aimed at creating places that fostered dialog and stimulated community life in which children take part. As van Eyck put it poetically: To consider the city is to encounter ourselves; To encounter the city is to rediscover the child; If the child rediscovers the city, the city will rediscover the child – ourselves.

In the future, the method praxeology and sociology should be considered and used differently for different purpose. But the core principle that concern human actions and psychologies in different situations and background identities should be kept in mind in a single person or a group of people.

IV POSITIONING

With my researches about interactive space for different groups of people, one lecture provided by Klaske Havik especially interested me a lot. The spatial narratives give me a lot unprecedented recognition that spatial perception can be read by different people in different ways. The description, transcription and prescription all give different interpretation for a common space. In this case, architects are not only the creator of the space and form, but also the good teller and author of experience of description, transcription and prescription. For a common space, architects should think about how to make the readers-visitors to perceive and capture a special piece based on their own backgrounds. This is also a significant point for the interactive space, which requires visitors to feel desire and likely to stay. The space will become valuable and meaningful immediately when comers find a closer relationship with them.

In terms of my topic-sport activities, which deserve a deep research about human behaviors. Berkers' presentation introduced many extra useful tools to research behaviors. For instance, the way making installation to research behaviors has already been applied in Aldo van Eyck's playgrounds I analyzed before. For my project, an interactive sport space maybe doesn't mean a large scale hall, but one small intervention with many praxeological details even can prompt spontaneous activities. Besides, the talk about praxeology gave a much broaden knowledge about the parameters deciding the spatial quality, which is a crucial judging criterion in studio Interiors Buildings Cities. Berkers mentioned the Atelier Bow-Wow: The world "behavior" includes human behavior inside and outside of the building, physical phenomenon produced by different elements such as light, air, heat, wind, and water in

architecture, and building's behaviors in its surroundings.¹⁰ Even a small window also has much potential to research behaviorology to let people meet. These parameters all play an important role in forming a good quality space simulating further activity.

The researching tools like observations and interviews are exactly what I used when investigating Indische Buurt. These two methods suggested by Jan Gehl and Jane Jacobs were also mentioned in Berkers' Lecture. When I first visited the site, the multicultural character immediately surprised me as different restaurants and greengrocers owned by Turkish, Moroccans and other ethnics are opening everywhere along the main commercial street. The initial impression was so dynamic instead of the bad reputation recorded by some reports. However, according to observation I found there were no more interaction beyond simple business ties. Young students, natives and minority entrepreneurs formed their own clusters without overlapping activities. An interview from an old Dutch lady directly showed the social shortage "People don't interact anymore. I hate it that behind the counters of the Albert Heijn they only speak Moroccan and Turkish. Then I feel out of place in my own country and in my own neighborhood". Similar feedbacks from other interviews made me decide to do something to bridge and bond social relationship. Therefore, theories from Jan Gehl, Jane Jacobs and Berkers made a great difference in the development of my project. After that, I set up two main methodological systems-praxeology and sociology. Like I mentioned before, I used praxeology to research individual daily life course and then find a certain point/agenda related to activities. While sociology was used to investigate one certain group's potential activities, like elderly, children, natives, minorities, long-time immigrants and middle-class newcomers, etc. Finally, these two outcomes can be complemented for each other to summarize a final decision about the function and activities to be placed.

During the lecture series, I also found other resonance. For instance, in Gorny's lecture about typology gave me many fantastic methods to research, especially the classification and artefacts. The general research approach in Interiors Buildings Cities follows the rule Researching Through Designing. A concrete artefact including models, drawings can provide conscious attempt at systematization of concepts and relations. The drawing of urban structures can efficiently help me understand the influence of existing facilities on the function of my project. The collection of artefacts done step by step can let me notice the formation of step story. As well as the typology classification can truly help me visualize the different requirements of different groups of people. In summary, all skills obtained in this lecture series not only helped me build a theoretical framework about the relationship between design and research but also a lot researching tools to proceed my project. All these knowledge and theories will be applied in my subsequent graduation project and future professional life.

END NOTES:

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