



A Study on Typology as a Research Method

Lecture Series on Research Methods

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I INTRODUCTION

During their studies most architecture students will be challenged to relate the design method with the research method. Although the connection of these two activities is very close, sometimes the outcome of these methods seem to be not well connected. Over the past 20 years it has been a main concern to clarify the relationship between the design method and the scientific one.

The architecture department of TU Delft is highlighting more and more the importance of these two notions. During the Lecture Series on Research Methods (LSRM), different methodological approaches were explored. This series of lectures was an attempt to make the students aware of the different methodologies they use during their work. I am conscious about the fact that design is an interdisciplinary process involving different methodologies, approaches and strategies. After following the LSRM lectures the relation between the design- and research method but also the distinction amongst these notions was much more clarified to me. Personally, the course gave me a new insight to the notion of methodology upon research. Meanwhile the organized workshops helped me a lot to think deeper about these notions. During the course I reflected back to previous studios and projects of mine. I realized that I was using certain methodologies and approaches subconsciously. Sometimes the undertaken research method was not coherent with the design methods I used. In the last year of my master studies I realized that I became more aware about the methods I am using during the research- and design process.

The LSRM course was in parallel with the very first phase of the graduation studio. The graduation studio focuses on 'Revitalising Heritage' and is part of the chair of Heritage and Architecture. The given site is located at the Hembrug terrain in the city of Zaandam. The area used to be the base of the ammunition and projectile production of the Netherlands. The first decision for the students was to select a building and redesign it within its context. In order to develop a design brief the first weeks of the studio are based on research. My personal fascination lies on the transformation of the abandoned ensemble into an indoor food market.

The aim of this paper is to define the research- methodological approach which is used during my graduation. Reflecting on previous work and the ongoing graduation studio project, and guided by the knowledge gained during the series of lectures in this semester I will answer the following question.

How can typological research influence the design decisions taken regarding the transformation of a building into an indoor market ?

II RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

Throughout my studies, I have realized that the most common methodology I am using is the study of types. During past projects in order to come up with a concept within the design brief, I used to study different typologies. For example, when I was designing affordable housing schemes for a project in India, I experimented with different typologies. I studied existing schemes in order to understand how space was used based on the target groups who were inhabiting the different types of dwellings. By exploring different aspects of typology as the transition from the interior to the exterior of the building, the way the schemes were stacked, the position within the urban fabric, and the historical context helped me grasp the architectural form. This method helped me review my own design decisions. During the first explorations of the graduation studio different means of studies on typology are being used.

Besides the practical use of the study of types, with this paper, I would like to delve deeper into the theoretical part of this episteme. Avermaete states that "*In architectural culture there exist 'frames of value and thought' which drive our logos and praxis*" (Avermaete,2016). These thoughts frames were called *epistemes* by the French philosopher Michael Foucault. These epistemes have been a strong tool for years now in the architectural field. The different epistemes acting as analytical tools help the architects understand the built environment. The first episteme introduced by Tom Avermaete is the typology also known as the study of types. This approach has been used since a long time ago in the architectural history. In the faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment of the TU Delft, the students are encouraged to discover the study of types from the very early stage of their studies. Personally, I believe that this episteme broadens the horizon of the architect and help us perceive the architectural framework we are working in. Moreover, the study of types not only unveil the architectural context of the built environment but also acts as evidence of the different typologies through history. The Italian art historian Giulio Carlo Argan states that "*typology may not be a determining factor in the creative process, but it is always in evidence much as iconography is in figurative arts, though its presence is not always obvious*" (Argan,1963). While researching different typologies architects should also be capable to filter the gained information in order to be able to be integrated with the design method.

In order to explore the theoretical part of the episteme of the study of types I will place this notion in a historical context. This will help me understand how the study of types developed or changed through time. The research is based on literature and articles written by philosophers, historians and architects. First of all the notion of type should be defined in order to understand the way this methodology is used. It is difficult to find only one definition, because each architectural theorist or historian values the notion of types on a different way.

III RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Etymologically, 'type' origins from the Greek word *typos* which means 'model, matrix, impression, mould, mark, figure, relief, original form' (Lee, 2011). According to the dictionary *type* is defined by "*number of things or persons sharing a particular characteristic, or set of characteristics, that causes them to be regarded as a group, more or less precisely defined or designated; class; category*" (Cambridge dictionary). In the architectural field *type* mainly refers to a group of buildings defined by their function, as for example museums, dwellings, and churches.

Back in history during the 17th and 18th century, the term of type appeared mainly in the domain of natural philosophy. The notion was used in biology in the classification of animals and plants. The modern conception of 'type' which is used by architectural theorists is a more recent phenomenon. The definition of the notion of type, in the architectural theory, was introduced in the *Dictionnaire historique d'architecture* in 1825 by Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy. For him, the word 'type' does not present so much an image of something to copy or imitate exactly as the idea of an element which should itself serve as an idea as rule for the model (Quincy,1825). He relates type more to an idea or a symbolism that is part of an object or element. A few years later in 1853, Gottfried Semper defined 'type' as a "*primitive form described by necessity but modified after the first materials which were used for its embodiment*" (Lee, 2011). The materials and building techniques Semper referred to are the hearth, terracing (masonry), roofing, and walling. This approach is more practical than the theory of Quatremère de Quincy.

The one who departs from the definition of Quatremère de Quincy, and positions the notion of type in building precedents is Giulio Carlo Argan. According to him the birth of the type is dependent on the existence of a series of buildings having between them an obvious formal and functional analogy (Argan,1963). Argan argues that in order to determine the type during the procedure of comparing and superimposing individual forms, particular characteristics each individual buildings are eliminated. The characteristics that remain are those who are common to every unit of the series of buildings. Therefore, the type is formed while a complex is being simplified.

During the 20th century the Italian architect Aldo Rossi considers 'type' as logical principle, which constitutes the form and the permanence of an object. He defines 'type' as *"the very idea of architecture, that which is closest to its essence"*.⁸ Also Rossi believes that 'types' in architecture derived from the architectural form of the past and has been reduced to basic elements. Although these 'types' vary from the past, their relationship with history is still present. Furthermore, according to Rossi 'type' as principle that can be found in the 'urban artifact'. The 'urban artifact' is not only a building structure in the city but it can be also a fragment of the city (Zhong, J.).

Another definition of 'type' was given by the Spanish architect Rafael Moneo. He implied that the concept of type is implicitly acknowledged also by language. Most simply, the notion of 'type' could be described as a group of objects which are characterized by structural similarities. From this we can result that *'type means the act of thinking in groups'* (Moneo, 1978). Moneo develops also another notion of 'types'. He clarifies that architecture is not only *described* by 'types' but it is also *produced* by 'types'. Based on this notion this is the explanation why architects relate their work with a precise type. In architectural development the most powerful moment is when a new type arises. To give up a known type and formulate new one is a great accomplishment for an architect.

Since the definition of type by Quatremère de Quincy who was the first to formally connect the notion of types with the built environment, the definition of type has changed a lot. The notion of type has also been affected by technological developments. The Italian architect Vittorio Gregotti mentions that type has become a tool for design. In the built environment type is connected with typology through certain characteristics. By pointing out the differences and similarities of particular characteristics, the architect is able to design a different type of building. Nowadays type is also used as reference for the architects in order to understand the requirements of the building they have to design.

IV POSITIONING

Recalling my past work and the way I approached different projects, and by observing the methods I am using in my graduation studio, I can relate my own research with the lectures given by Tom Avermaete and Stefano Milani. Looking through the lens of types seems to be an old tradition in the history of the architectural field. After following both lectures during the past semester and writing this paper, the theoretical part of the concept of type became more clear to me. Also I understood that the notions of type and typology have a strong relationship with the built environment. The methodology of the study of types is part of my graduation as well. Based on the literature research my opinion is mostly aligned with the position of Argan and Gregotti.

At this phase of graduation the focus lies on the formation of the concept and building program. In order to support my personal fascination of the indoor market, I need a strong narrative. This leads to more questions regarding the design decisions. I believe that studying the types will help me perceive the needs of the project I will design. This methodological tool helps me to clarify questions related within the urban fabric, the organization of space, or the use of space by different target groups. Also I think the study of types will be usefully tool in order to review my design decisions.

Inside the methodology of the study of types I will use several methods in order to continue with the design process. First of all I started studying different types of indoor markets. I will try to look at the differences and similarities between these projects in order to simplify the architectural object.

Another important aspect is the circulation within the building. Therefore I will look again into different typologies. To gain as much information possible I use different sources. Theoretical literature studies, case studies of other markets, or even social movements are used to delve deeper in the market typology and to understand how food shapes the city. This combination is very fruitful because information is gained from different perspectives.

As a researcher I believe that drawings will be really important during the study of types. By approaching each drawing in the same way in the end it will be more easier to draw a conclusion. Also by drawing plan views and sections based on different typologies I should be able to make the most suitable design decision for the final outcome of the building.

In conclusion, it is my strong belief that the study of types is a valuable methodological tool regarding architectural decisions. With this method we can draw information from the past, analyze and

understand the architectural and historical context of the built environment. The architect can compare different architectural elements and answer difficult design questions. In a way the architect is creating a typological guide which will help him in the end to conceive a building. Furthermore, In my opinion the fact of becoming conscious about the research- and design methods used, makes the architect able to understand which methodology will work more efficiently in relation to the questions I want to answer regarding my project.

According to Argan, *every architectural project has this typological aspect; whether it is that the architect consciously follows the 'type' or want to depart from it; or even in the sense that every building is an attempt to produce another 'type'*. To answer my research question, typological research can be seen as a methodological tool which can influence the decisions taken regarding the design.

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