

## **Similar goals, different understandings- A Humanitarian approach towards architecture and research methodology**

Self- Assessment on Research Methods

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### Introduction

In a sense, architectural research has been conducted throughout the history of architecture. The development of particular structural forms of building materials over the centuries is the outcome of trial-and-error experimentation, systematic observation, and application of such building principles to other building projects.<sup>1</sup> However, the conduct of architectural research outside the confines of specific building projects is a much more recent phenomenon. The field of architectural research has grown considerably in recent years. Other topic areas such as socio-behavioral issues, design methods, and energy conservation are also part of the research field.<sup>2</sup> With a broadening field of research, it is important to remain aware of how the research is composed and how that research can influence the design process.

My research was conducted within the framework of the Dutch Housing Graduation Studio. The design location is the Minervahaven in Amsterdam. The Minervahaven is one of the 12 sub-areas, including old port areas that will be transformed into a living and working environment. There is a great need for living and working space in Amsterdam. But for whom? With this, the research is briefly introduced.

In recent years, Dutch society is in transition. The traditional welfare state is being transformed into a participation society. It is a model for a society where citizens are self-reliant and less dependent on the government. The vulnerable citizens are also expected to actively participate in society.

Citizens who are in a vulnerable position should be received as little as possible by authorities and as soon as possible transferred to self-sufficient living, the municipalities have the role to provide the accommodations. In order to live as independently as possible in the neighborhood, professional care is kept to a minimum and support systems are developed, consisting of volunteers and local residents.<sup>3</sup>

Because more vulnerable people come to live in the neighborhood, there is a need for small, affordable, self-reliant homes, and also for residential environments where attention is paid to fellow residents.

Hypothesis: implementation of space for social encounter in architecture promotes the inclusion of vulnerable target groups.

This shows that the research focuses on the humanitarian aspects of architecture and the spatial effects that stimulate encounter. In the total survey, I used

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1 Groat, L., Wang, D., *Architectural Research Methods* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 6.

2 Groat, L., Wang, D., *Architectural Research Methods* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 7.

3 Davelaar, M., Gruppen, A., & Knevel, J. (2018). *Goede Buren: Lessen uit gemengde woonprojecten in Utrecht*. Utrecht, Nederland: Hogeschool Utrecht, Kenniscentrum Sociale, 14-15.

various methods to collect information. A literature study has been carried out, precedent analysis has been carried out systematically and information has been gained through interviews.

In addition, on the basis of the analyzed literature, I have developed spatial tools that should stimulate public encounter in my design. In this position paper, the research methodological of the chosen topic (encounter in architecture) is described and criticized. In particular, I focus on the literature of Jan Gehl and Herman Hertzberger. Both architects present distinct ideas about the relationship between space and public encounter. In this paper, I describe which research methodologies the writers have implemented and how this research has contributed to my curriculum and the development of the design tools.

## Discussion Jan Gehl

Before looking at the research process, it is important to first define research to identify components that are important for research. James Snyder provides a commonly accepted definition of research; it is "systematic inquiry directed towards the creation of knowledge."<sup>4</sup> Two elements of the definition appear to be important. Firstly, it is important that there is a conscious demarcation of how particular information is categorized, analyzed and presented. Secondly, the notion of knowledge creation is often cited as a characteristic of the research endeavor.<sup>5</sup>

Social encounter in space plays an important role in my research. The definition of encounter is: a meeting, especially one that was not planned.<sup>6</sup> In the literature studied, the focus is on creating spatial qualities to make it attractive to meet and to stay in space. This encounter can lead to interaction.

To be able to develop spatial instruments that stimulate encounter, I was the first to study the literature of Jan Gehl and to describe the applied research methodologies. This research is in the fields of architecture and sociology. Sociology is the study of society or the way society is organized.<sup>7</sup>

Staying in the public space has to do with certain activities that ensure that people leave home. In his literature, Jan Gehl distinguishes three activities: necessary activities, optional activities and social activities. Social activities are the most important activities that can take place in a public space. To stimulate meeting, it is necessary to ensure that social activities take place. These activities are a consequence of the presence of others. To stimulate the presence of people it is important to provide sufficient space for optional activities. Optional activities only take place when the conditions of the space are favorable and inviting. It is important to make space with the right accommodation qualities such as protection against traffic and weather conditions and the presence of catering establishments and toilet buildings, which makes it possible for people to stay somewhere longer.<sup>8</sup>

As described, it is important that a meeting place possesses residence qualities. In his study, Jan Gehl distinguishes 12 qualities of the perception of public space at human eye level. These requirements relate to the protection and safety of people, the comfortable use of space and the role of architecture and design. The requirements regarding protection and safety are the most important. If one of the requirements cannot be guaranteed, the other requirements also have no meaning.<sup>9</sup>

By studying the literature of Jan Gehl, I have crystallized elements such as dimensions and spatial requirements that stimulate encounter and interpersonal relationships. In addition to understanding and interpreting the literature, it is also important to understand how that research came about. Jan Gehl describes his conclusions through years of observation of the public. From this, it can be concluded that it improves a qualitative research methodology.

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4 James Snyder, *Architectural Research* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1984).

5 Groat, L., Wang, D., *Architectural Research Methods* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 8.

6 Macmillan English Dictionary. (n.d.). encounter (noun) definition and synonyms | Macmillan Dictionary. Retrieved January 24, 2019, from [https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/encounter\\_1](https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/encounter_1)

7 Collins English Dictionary. (2019, January 24). Sociology definition and meaning | Collins English Dictionary. Retrieved January 24, 2019, from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/sociology>

8 Gehl, J. (2011). *Life between buildings; using public space*. Washington: Island Press, 9-12.

9 Gehl, J. (2010). *Cities for people*. Washington: Island Press, 239.

In the literature qualitative research is described as follows:

" Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that you have to do things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of people. Qualitative research involves the study use and collection of a variety of empirical methods ".<sup>10</sup>

Jan Gehl is very specific in describing his research methods. It concerns observations of the environment and a systematic approach to the data obtained. Systematic and extensive documentation is important in order to compare the results or to later study in the same or some other places. When it comes to observing the public, he describes a specific approach. As a general rule, users are not actively involved in the sense of being questioned, rather they are observed, their activities and behavior mapped in order to better understand the needs of the city. The direct observations help to understand why some spaces are used and others are not.<sup>11</sup>

The observations have also been systematically executed and documented. The data is explicitly described in the following aspects: counting, mapping, tracking, looking for traces, photo grading, keeping a diary and test walks.<sup>12</sup> Keeping these elements is part of the empirical methods. In this way the information is collected in a quantitative way, the sites are then interpreted according to the author's own insight.

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10 Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, *Strategies for Qualitative Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1998), 3.

11 Gehl, J., & Svarre, B. (2013). *How to Study Public Life*. Washington: Island Press, 3.

12 Gehl, J., & Svarre, B. (2013). *How to Study Public Life*. Washington: Island Press, 24.

## Discussion Herman Hertzberger

As I described earlier in my essay, my goal is to develop tools that can stimulate social encounter in my architecture. In the previous discussion, the principles and research methodologies according to Jan Gehl were described. In order to analyze the encounter on different aspects, I look at the work of Herman Hertzberger in this discussion.

When Jan Gehl describes encounters in the public space and particularly at eye level, Herman Hertzberger states that the buildings themselves must function as an urban fabric: "Buildings, in my opinion, should be interpreting as cities. At least they should exhibit the same distinction internally between the shared realms- the streets and squares, the more detached or contained spaces- the 'houses' and other 'buildings'. The structure of streets and squares this generates within the building coincides with the internal circulation there so that everyone gets to routes that intersect with others. Such a structure makes it fundamentally preeminently suited to social exchange between its users or inhabitants".<sup>13</sup>

In addition, Herman Hertzberger links a third dimension to the social encounter. "When organizing the design, you can go a long way in influencing visual relationships and opportunities for encountering or voiding others. Strategic sight lines, places for sojourns and intersections or circulation routes articulate by inserting voids, landings, bridges, light and dark places, views out, views through and screens to conceal protection- these are some of the means architects at their disposal".<sup>14</sup>

The quotations described reflect the elements that, according to Herman Hertzberger, make room for social encounter. When Jan Gehl clearly maps out his research methodologies and also publishes a book about it. Are the research methodologies in the work of Herman Hertzberger less easy to trace. In his literature, theories are frequently described with the support of mapping, sketching, and references. His fascination with humanistic architecture comes to the fore. Hertzberger was influenced by his studies into a sociological approach of architecture.<sup>15</sup>

In the literature in which the work of Herman Hertzberger is analyzed, it is described, what makes Hertzberger theoretically productive is his emphasis on relationality: between parts of buildings and wholes, between individuals and groups an architect can give and that which users can make. He builds on empirical design to create a set of conceptual tools that are designed to think about designed space in both general terms and in the specific case of a particular building.<sup>16</sup>

The word 'empirical' derives from the Greek word for 'experience.' The basis of empirical design is previous experience, without regard to any systematic theory.<sup>17</sup> Here the designer relies on his knowledge with regard to spatial proportions, choice of materials and assassination.

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13 Hertzberger, H. (2010). *Space and the Architect: Lessons in Architecture 2*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 176.

14 Hertzberger, H. (2010). *Space and the Architect: Lessons in Architecture 2*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 156.

15 Nai010 publishers. (2015a, May 9). "Herman Hertzberger" the first complete oeuvre on the Dutch master, by nai010 publishers - BMIAA. Retrieved January 24, 2019, from <https://www.bmiaa.com/herman-hertzberger-the-first-complete-oeuvre-on-the-dutch-master-by-nai010-publishers/>

16 Wood, A. (2017). *A School's Lived Architecture: the politics and ethics of flexible learning spaces*. Retrieved from <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/618818/1/PhD%20Thesis%20Adam%20Wood%20A%20School's%20Lived%20Architecture%20-%20the%20politics%20and%20ethics%20of%20flexible%20learning%20spaces.pdf>, 70.

This statement seems to correspond to the following definition that is considered part of qualitative research. "The researcher uses his own characteristics and qualities".<sup>18</sup>

Typical of Herman Hertzberger's designs is that he does not fully equip his buildings, but leaves room for the final users. That is also part of the Participation movement in architecture.

His writing makes clear not just that he has created space as part of an open system and that he exploits this: he designs for recursivity where users have active involvement with the ongoing negotiation of a building's spaces and their interpretive potential.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Seamon, 7 in Groat, L., Wang, D., *Architectural Research Methods* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 228.

<sup>19</sup> Wood, A. (2017). *A School's Lived Architecture: the politics and ethics of flexible learning spaces*. Retrieved from <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/618818/1/PhD%20Thesis%20Adam%20Wood%20A%20School's%20Lived%20Architecture%20-%20the%20politics%20and%20ethics%20of%20flexible%20learning%20spaces.pdf>, 70.

## Position

An essential element for my research was gathering knowledge about how social encounters arise and how architecture can contribute to this. One goal of the research was to develop a toolbox that can be used in architecture to stimulate social encounter. I did a literature study containing the literature of Jan Gehl and Herman Hertzberger and depicted practical elements. This has given me the opportunity to describe the human dimension as Jan Gehl describes it in his study and to merge it with the spatial spectacle of Herman Hertzberger.

Conceptually I have drawn up elements that make room for social encounter and anonymity. Intuitively, by basing itself on the findings of the described authors.

By writing the position paper and looking at how the information was obtained, I gained more insight into the so-called scientificity of my study and my conceptual starting points.

The literature studied concerns a qualitative analysis, in which the interpretations of the author are present. However, Jan Gehl bases his findings on quantitatively obtained data. But due to the nature of observation, it makes a qualitative study. Herman Hertzberger illustrates his plea with images and references. I could not find any further reference to the sociological studies carried out.

Qualitative research is a part of socio-anthropological research. The underlying approach requires detailed observation, explanation and assumes that it is impossible to define what is important. It argues that validity is important than attempting to rigorously define what is being observed and done by the whole situation. In order to evaluate the complexity and ensure that their decision is taken account of both unique and general factors.<sup>20</sup>

Also by means of a proper analysis, I analyzed only the outcomes, so that the interpretation of the data is not taken into account. For the remainder of my study, I also want to collect quantitative data with which I can test the qualitative analysis I have studied. To gain even more insights.

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<sup>20</sup> Atieno Ochieng, P. (2009). *An analysis of the strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms*. Retrieved from [http://www.scientiasocialis.it/pec/files/pdf/Atieno\\_Vol.13.pdf](http://www.scientiasocialis.it/pec/files/pdf/Atieno_Vol.13.pdf), 1.