

# DESIGNING FOR ARTIST

A Praxeological research on the creative use of space in Artist communities

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Chair of Dwelling "Dutch Housing"

Thesis "Artist Housing"

Argumentation in making choices during the design process is of great importance. Although architecture acts through form, a grounded and coherent line of argumentation to be able to come to this form is of greater importance than when this form would be a solely autonomous and stylistic object. Changing social, political, technological and economic conditions are continuously influencing the architectural profession.

Developing a working method based on research allows us to make a consistent line of argumentation during the design process which will lead to a justified design proposal related to for instance these changes in society. There is no right or wrong in methods of approach, but each will have its own design process and will lead to a unique final result. In this, research methodological awareness opens doors to various systems of knowledge, approaches and methods which play an important role in critically positioning ourselves as architects.

The Research Methods lectures made me critically reflect on the way I did research in previous design projects. I realized that I was not consciously aware of the general methodologies that outline the commonly used methods for both research and design. The awareness of research methodologies and choosing one to focus on, helps to coherently use different methods and contributes to systematically set up a targeted research approach which will lead to more consistent design choices and in turn a coherent design proposal. The lack of this awareness in previous projects often led to a research process characterized as an increasingly divergent line of information and thought which makes it difficult to make choices during the design process. The knowledge gained during the course helped me better grasping the essence and purpose of the general research approach of the graduation studio. Moreover, the course helped me defining the research methodology and corresponding methods which suited the specific topic I focused on, which in advance helped to systematically work towards a justified design proposal.

The case of the 'Dutch Housing Graduation Studio' is 'Haven-Stad' in Amsterdam, a city intensification plan proposed by the municipality which involves 75.000 dwellings to be developed in a mixed work-live environment. The main assignment is designing a housing scheme for a specific target group related to a relevant problem in Amsterdam or society at large. The general approach of the studio can be defined as a 'context-led' research, which is basically divided in two parts. The first part aims at framing the problem, forming a deep comprehension of the target group and proving the relevance and value of designing a housing scheme within this context. The collected data, primarily obtained from literature research, must find the answer to the formulated research-question which in advance must lead to a design-question which is related to topic specific dwelling types. The second part involves case-studies in which these specific dwelling types can be found and analyzed according to the formulated design-question. In this the main design principles are unraveled to subsequently adjust and combine these DNA's into a design proposal which fits the context of the assignment. Important is to coherently make use of the same drawing methods in all case studies to be able to make valuable comparisons.

I am developing a housing scheme for artists. The Amsterdam artists form diverse, lively and vital communities and play a significant role in the constitution of the city as the creative capital of the Netherlands. But due to the lack of workspace, high rents and ongoing process of gentrification, they are pushed further and further away from the city-center. Even some who have established their self-built environments, often located at abandoned harbor areas which they have transformed into valuable creative cultural hotspots, are today fighting for their place to live and work. Considering these self-built creative environments, most inspiring for me were the praxeology lecture and the corresponding literature which started me thinking about how I could position myself as the architect of the envisioned design project. Especially the provided text of Tom Avermaete<sup>1</sup> which also brought me to another text: *The Architecture of the 'Commons': Towards a New Definition of the Architectural Project* in which he describes inspiring bottom-up projects and the accompanying possible roles the architect could take in developing these projects<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Avermaete, T. (2010). The architect and the Public: Empowering the People in Postwar Architecture Culture. *Hunch* (14), 48-63.

<sup>2</sup> Avermaete, T. (2016). The Architecture of the "Commons": Towards a New Definition of the Architectural Project. In *Architecture in The Netherlands 2015/2016* (pp. 36-43). Rotterdam: nai010.

In this paper I will methodologically reflect on the research approach I developed thus far during the ongoing graduation studio. More precisely, the focus will be on discussing the used methods and framing it within a specific episteme through which I hope to find missing elements which are crucial in finding justified answers to the research questions. For the purpose of this paper I will relate this to the following question: *How to position myself as the architect in developing a live-work environment for artists as the creative users of the designed spaces?*

## II A PRAXEOLOGICAL APPROACH

To explore the research question it is important to dive into the everyday lives of artists within the living the specific context of an artist housing complex, in order to investigate how they may impact the design and how to anticipate on this as the architect of the project. As described by Jonathan Hill, "Architecture is made by the architect and the user"<sup>3</sup>. Especially when the user is a creative mind like an artist, it is reasonable to expect that the designed spaces will be recreated or given new uses<sup>4</sup>. In this case it is therefore valuable to involve the artists in the research and design process to get a fuller comprehension of their everyday routines which contains information about how they use their living – and work spaces, which is valuable knowledge to incorporate in the design. Defining the user as 'passive'<sup>5</sup>, hence externally propose an idea of what the space should be based on how its use is predicted would be naïve and missed opportunity.

An ethnographic research would be a suitable way to do a qualitative research into their daily practices. Normally an ethnographic research would take at least several months to get a deeper social engagement with the informants<sup>6</sup>, but such long observations won't fit within the time frame of the studio. Yet, instead of a full ethnography, I visited to the reference projects to observe the daily routines the artists. Together with some open-ended interviews I was hoping to find out strengths and weaknesses of the projects that could not have been discovered through merely a quantitative plan-analyses based on drawings and literature. In this way a good insight can be formed on how the designed spaces are actually being used compared to how they were assigned to be used in the architectural design.

Hence, the strategy I adopted to explore the research question is the 'case-study': "an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon or setting ... in its real-life context"<sup>7</sup>. In this case it concerns a 'multiple-case study'<sup>8</sup>, in which both typical historical atelier-dwelling complexes and contemporary live-work environments (related to creative practices) are analyzed. To make the findings visible I used movement diagrams which can give insight in the relation between spatiality and functionality. Additionally it structures the relation between the different scales of the project, hence how for instance circulation systems link between public, communal and private, inside and outside. Through abstract analytical drawings of function, use and movement, the different contexts in terms of place and time can be evaluated and compared. To further define how the designed spaces are actually being used, the original configuration of spaces and their functions (live, work, eat, sleep, leisure) were diagrammed and subsequently compared to the data collected from the observations and interviews.

Since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the role of the architect as 'master-builder' gradually altered due to an increasing amount of specialized actors being involved in increasingly complex design projects<sup>9</sup>. This image of the 'master-architect' is even more challenged considering the increasing diversity of positions and approaches of architects in relation to 'the public' as described by

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<sup>3</sup> Hill, J. (2001). The use of architects. *Urban Studies*, 38(2), 351–365.

<sup>4</sup> Idem.

<sup>5</sup> Idem.

<sup>6</sup> Lucas, R. (2016). *Research Methods for Architecture*. London: Laurence King Publishing.

<sup>7</sup> Groat, L., & Wang, D. (2013). *Architectural Research Methods* (2nd ed.). New Jersey: Wiley. (p.418, 421)

<sup>8</sup> Idem. (p.433)

<sup>9</sup> The architect was the 'master-builder' of the entire project with a clear relationship towards the client as future owner. The architect dealt with all facets of the design and realization process from visualizations to monitoring his work administratively and in terms of technical design, at the building site. From: Asselbergs, T. (2017). *The New Architect: Integrating innovation into architectural assignments: in search of a new role. Delft Lectures on Architectural design* (pp. 293-311). Delft: TU Delft Open.

Tom Avermaete in his article *The architect and the Public: Empowering People in Postwar Architecture Culture*, which testifies to the 'democratization' of architecture, hence becoming more socially engaged practice<sup>10</sup>. A comparable shift can be recognized in the artists' profession, where collaboration through social and participatory formats, often in a public context, are increasingly complementing the artist as autonomous object maker<sup>11</sup>. This indicates, among many other possible social, cultural, political, economic or technological changes, that a more qualitative study on how the analyzed projects actually work today, is a valuable contribution to the mere quantitative data collected through drawing plan-analyses.

Considering all the above and the valuable role the artists can play in co-creating the individual dwelling –and workspaces as well as the communal and public spaces, the methodology for this research will be primarily within the episteme of praxeology. Praxeology is 'the study of human action and conduct' which in the praxis of architecture provides methods of investigating 'the built environment as stage for everyday practice' to 'develop an eye for the actual users and not the imagined ones'<sup>12</sup>.

### III THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAXEOLGY WITHIN DIFFERENT SCALES

Reflecting on the method of articulating movement, praxeological studies related to dwelling design can be traced back to the 1920s, a period characterized by socialist ideals with emancipatory goals to improve the social, economic and political conditions of the working-class and woman. Especially the graphic and diagrammatic representations of household management show influential drawing methods in researching daily practices and movement at home, aiming at emancipating woman from their household ties. Brüno Taut was one of the first who mapped these studies in his book *Die Neues Wohnung*<sup>13</sup>. The book contains photographs, drawings and movement diagrams aiming at rearrangement of living rooms and kitchens to make them more spacious, healthy, efficient in use and easier to clean. He also refers to Christine Frederick who applied Taylorist approaches to rearrange kitchens by drawing movement diagrams which aimed at more efficient use<sup>14</sup>. In line with these approaches, Margarete Schütte-Lihotsky's adopted the same methods to investigate efficiency in the practice of cooking, which resulted in the famous Frankfurt Kitchen design. This design was made for a social housing project in Frankfurt developed by Ernst May in the 1920s which was realized on the basis of *Existenzminimum* which provided inhabitants affordable housing by minimizing the amount of space. Although the Frankfurt Kitchen had feminist aims by reducing the time woman had to spend on kitchen tasks, leaving more time to spend on leisure and become more socially involved in the public realm, it still supported a gendered division of labor. As example Hilde Heynen stresses that the heights of cabinets for instance, were ergonomically designed for woman and the minimal amount of square meters did not invite husband and children to help with kitchen tasks<sup>15</sup>. This indicates that merely quantitative can result in unwanted results which were previously not imagined. But combining these quantitative studies of movement and daily practice with more qualitative studies in which the users are more socially engaged in the research, can lead to better outcomes. This is comparable to the positioning between the etic and emic approach. As discussed by Lucas: "Much of the most successful research will move between these two positions"<sup>16</sup>.

Considering the earlier described grown interest of the architectural practice for the public, the articulation of movement also plays an important role in linking the private spaces with collective and public spaces, hence connecting the building with the city. As discussed by Dick Van Gameren, the importance of studies on how movement is able to define the positioning of the building in its context

<sup>10</sup> Avermaete, T. (2010). The architect and the Public: Empowering the People in Postwar Architecture Culture. *Hunch* (14), 48-63.

<sup>11</sup> Sholette, G. (2012). After OWS: Social Practice Art, Abstraction, and the Limits of the Social. *E-flux journal* (31). Retrieved from <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/31/68204/after-ows-social-practice-art-abstraction-and-the-limits-of-the-social/>

<sup>12</sup> Berkens, M. (2019). *AR3A 160 Lecture Series Research Methods: Praxeology* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <https://brightspace.tudelft.nl/d2l/le/content/124944/viewContent/1274965/View>

<sup>13</sup> Taut, B. (1925). *Die Neue Wohnung: Die Frau als Schöpferin* (3rd ed.). Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann.

<sup>14</sup> Idem. (p. 66)

<sup>15</sup> Heynen, H. (2014). Taylor's Housewife. In *SQM: The Quantified Home* (pp. 42–47). Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers.

<sup>16</sup> Lucas, R. (2016). *Research Methods for Architecture*. London: Laurence King Publishing.

can be particular traced in post-war modernist buildings<sup>17</sup>. But it in this case the design of movement played a central role to reconcile the perception of the autonomous building in a “continuous landscape with a completely new idea of the meaning of context and of local traditions”<sup>18</sup>. Although the good intentions to design buildings suiting modern life which brought us innovative building designs still valuable today, the general vision of the Modern Movement distanced architecture from the real context of society: the people. As Richard Sennet also nicely formulates in *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*: “the vision of the rational and functional city is produced for people instead of by them”<sup>19</sup>.

Due to the rise of neoliberal politics, architectural projects with a strong social interest are often no longer supported by the government. According to Tom Avermaete this led to a search for a new definition of the architectural project with a more bottom-up approach characterized by social participation and collaborative initiatives<sup>20</sup>. An interesting movement in this are the *Baugruppen* which became a popular strategy in housing development the past decades but know a long history in Germany. This strategy, today also referred to as ‘collective private commissioning’ (CPC) became interesting during the financial crisis when traditional developers didn’t want to take financial risks of building new houses<sup>21</sup>.

#### IV POSITIONING

Within the general approach of the studio, this book of Sennet was mandatory literature. Sennet explores historical and contemporary situations of several cities around the globe and compares leading figures and their visions on urban and architectural design in able find out how our contemporary cities might ‘open up’, meaning reconnecting the ‘*ville*’ (the physical built environment) and the ‘*cité*’ (the anthropology and perception of living the city) in which the ‘*ville*’ has to allow different kinds of use than most urbanists and architects could not imagine in advance<sup>22</sup>. The book thoroughly describes this split between the built and the lived and how this also created a split between on the one hand the urbanists and architects and on the other hand urban planners and sociologists. He presents five ‘open forms’ to ‘open up’ the city which should create a vital urban life where the increasing diverse clusters of people can live together in harmony<sup>23</sup>. Along these aspects I started experimenting with the form of the housing scheme in relation to the context of the city. The book made me critically reflect on the methods and approaches of Kevin Lynch<sup>24</sup> and Jane Jacobs<sup>25</sup> and which among many others are discussed throughout the book. The tools and described observations on the everyday socio-spatial practices in the book were of great value in connecting sociological aspects with architectural form of the built environment, and moreover helped me further positioning myself as an architect.

Concerning my role in developing a live-work environment for artists as the creative users, I consider the praxeological methodology and the accompanying methods I used as a valuable approach to research the connection between on the one hand architectural form and space and on

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<sup>17</sup> Van Gameren, D. (2017). Revisions of space; Positioning and repositioning space in and around buildings. *Delft Lectures on Architectural design* (pp. 95-123). Delft: TU Delft Open. (p.97)

In this text Van Gameren shows different movement analysis of famous post-war modernist buildings like the Tokyo Metropolitan Festival Hall designed by Maekawa Kundio (1957-1961), the Lake Point Tower designed by Schipporeit-Heinrich Associates (1965) and the Fort Foundation Building designed by Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo and Associates (1963-1968). By referring to his personal contribution to ‘recent’ projects in which similar movement diagrams are used, he shows that such methods of analyzing movement are still popular today.

<sup>18</sup> Idem. (p.97)

<sup>19</sup> Sennet, R. (2018). *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*. London: Allen Lane. (p. 88)

<sup>20</sup> Avermaete, T. (2016). The Architecture of the “Commons”: Towards a New Definition of the Architectural Project. In *Architecture in The Netherlands 2015/2016* (pp. 36–43). Rotterdam: nai010.

<sup>21</sup> Ritsema, A., Krompier, V., Van Gameren, D., & Van der Putt, P. (2013). *Baugruppen as Catalysts for New Urban Housing Quality*. (D. Van Gameren & P. Van der Putt, Eds.), *DASH Building Together: The Architecture of Collective Private Commissions*, 8. (p. 3)

<sup>22</sup> Sennet, R. (2018). *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*. London: Allen Lane. (p. 88)

<sup>23</sup> The tools he provides throughout the book to ‘open up’ cities are: the creation of ‘synchronous space’, where lots of things can happen simultaneously; the marking of ‘particular spaces as important’ for people to be able to orientate themselves; the understanding that places come life ‘at its edges’; the necessity of ‘porosity’, a membrane that between functions and groups of people; the ‘incompletely built form’ which creates continuous evolution and enables to restore improper developments.

<sup>24</sup> Lynch, K. (1997). *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

<sup>25</sup> Jacobs, J (1961). *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House.

the other the more social aspect of how it is used. The case-studies, in which I combined the quantitative data of the plan-analysis with the qualitative data obtained from observations and interviews, gave a good insight on how designed spaces were sometimes very creatively being used and contained valuable information in making design choices<sup>26</sup>.

The case-studies of were also valuable in understanding how it came about in terms of its design, development and commissioning, and what significance these building and practices have for the communities themselves but also for the neighborhood and entire city. Considering the rather difficult context of Amsterdam in which affordability is a great issue, the financing of the project also be challenging considering the economically vulnerable target group which means that subsidies probably will be necessary to get the project of the ground. Therefore I feel the urge as the architect to investigate how this could be done. Referring to Avermaete, I would describe my role as a facilitating activist, who fights for the spatial justice of the Amsterdam artists by socially engaging with possible future inhabitants.

The particular case study I did on Integratives Bauprojekt am ehemaligen Blumengroßmarkt in Berlin, designed by the firms ifau and heide & Von Beckerath (IBeB), which is developed according a CPC strategy could be an example how to partially develop the project and position myself as architect.

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<sup>26</sup> Examples are for instance communal dinners in corridors and that many artists used their double-height atelier-space for multiple purposes like dining and relaxing although the original design of the dwellings had separate rooms for these uses. Some even made use of the double height to build a plateau to add extra functions to the atelier-space.