

FEELING ATMOSPHERES

Feeling atmospheres - a research to the methodology of analyzing atmospheres.

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Thesis "Feeling atmospheres"

Methodology is one of the main focusses within the research in the studio of Methods and Analysis during the first semester. This year, the studio focusses on the city of Skopje, the capital of the former republic of Yugoslavia in Macedonia. The city of Skopje has a rich history; a big part of the city centre was demolished after the earthquake in 1963. The city was rebuilt by the Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, in cooperation with the Croatian architects Wenzler and Mischevik, who made a master plan where concrete megastructures and brutalist buildings took over the image of the city. In the period around 2010, the Macedonian government decided to start with project of 'Skopje 2014', a project where facades of governmental and residential buildings in the city centre were replaced with neoclassic facades and where a huge number of statues and squares were added to the city, to create a new identity for the city.

The research in the studio of Methods and Analysis is separated in two parts: the research of the context of Skopje and the research into precedents in Skopje. This paper will focus on the research of precedents, where the main theme is the atmosphere in different squares. Research of atmospheres was interesting to look at, because of the many methods which can be used to analyse the atmosphere in a place. Therefore, this paper will focus on the methodology of research on atmospheres.

In the project of 'Skopje 2014', squares had a big role. The main image of Skopje nowadays is the image of Macedonia Square, with the 30 metres high statue of Alexander the Great in the middle (Figure 1). Besides this main square, there is a big number of squares reconstructed or added to the city. Even though these squares are connected with each other, they all have very different atmospheres. The focus of the research is about how these atmospheres can be so different.



Figure 1. Alexander the Great statue on Macedonia Square in Skopje (Nádai, 2017)

The research question in this paper will be: “which methods can be used best to analyse difference in atmosphere on different sites?”. To answer this question, firstly the used methods in the research to different atmospheres in the squares of Skopje will be explained, with the reasoning of the used methodology and methods. Secondly, with literature studies, different methods for the analysis to atmosphere in places will be researched. These different literature studies will be compared with each other, as well as with the methods used in my own research. Based on the findings, a position toward the methodology of the analysis of atmospheres will be formed.

II METHODS FOR ANALYSIS IN SKOPJE

During the start of the research, it was hard to fully focus directly on the atmosphere in the squares, because the location and background of the squares were still unfamiliar. The research started with literature study and looking at pictures to get a hold of the atmosphere. With different kinds of mapping (Nollie's maps, transport maps, materiality maps), the first assumptions of what the atmosphere may be like were made. This starting process was necessary to find the impact of the context of the squares; how is the balance between public and private space in the squares, how do people move through the squares, does the materiality have an impact on the movement of people, etc. Even though this preliminary research was important, it didn't give any information about the atmospheres in the sites, other than 'new things are built' or 'it's an old square'. The research of atmosphere could only really start when present on the sites, so the atmosphere could be perceived.

While on the fieldtrip, I focused on three different elements to narrow down the research: *the activity*, *the materiality* and *the functionality*¹. The focus of the analysis of these elements were the following:

Activity: Focus on the different kinds of activity people did

Materiality: Focus on the materiality changes on the sites

Functionality: Focus on the functions on and around the squares

For each of the elements the same set of methods were used in the same order; the analysis started with observing and capturing through pictures and notes. These observations, pictures and notes were hereafter analyzed. The conclusion of this analysis was put in diagrams and analytical drawings (Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4).

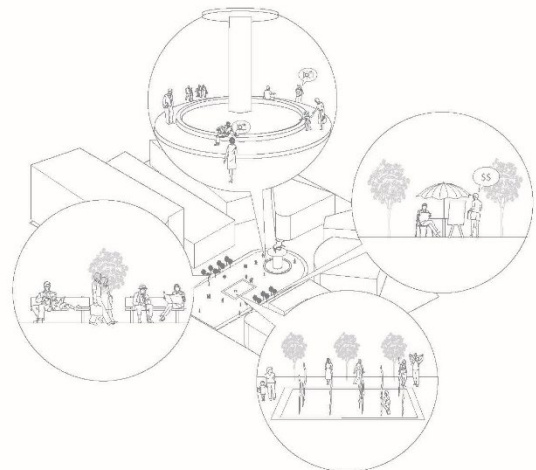


Figure 2. Observation and diagram for activity research (own image)

¹ For each element I made a definition, so it would be more focussed towards the right direction.

Activity: The condition in which things are happening or being done

Materiality: The quality or state of being material

Function: An activity that is natural to or the purpose of a person or thing

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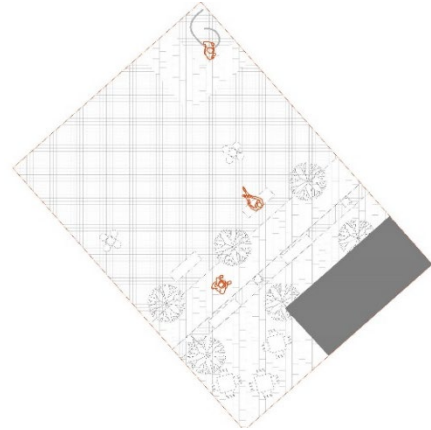


Figure 3. Observation and analytical drawing for materiality research (own image)

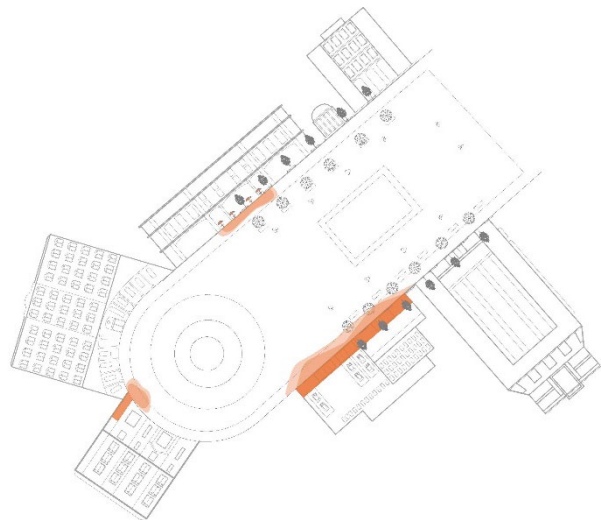


Figure 4. Observation and analytical drawing for functional research (own image)

What can be concluded from this, is that the research to atmosphere was built up in three different phases: Preliminary research, through literature studies and mapping, the research to the different atmospheres, through observing and capturing with pictures, and the conclusion through the analytical drawings and diagrams (Figure 5).

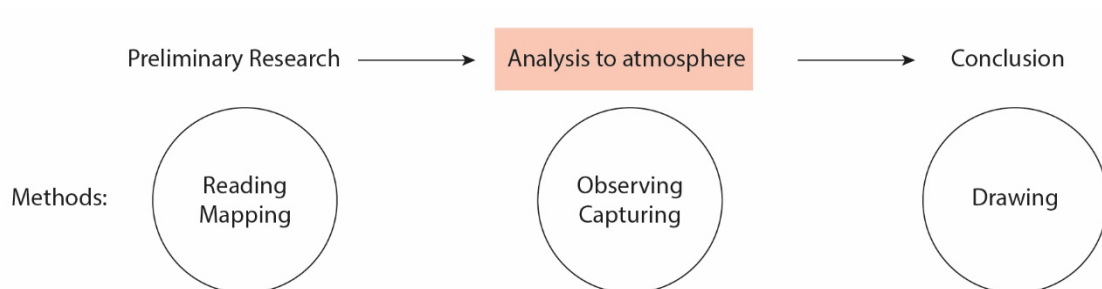


Figure 5. Diagram for the used methods in the research to atmospheres in different squares in Skopje.(own image)

The research was set up as a, as Lucas (2016) called it, context-led research. By first looking at the context, in a historical and demographical way, the situation of the sites could be understood better. With a better knowledge about the history and a clear view on the methodology, the findings could be put in the concluding images.

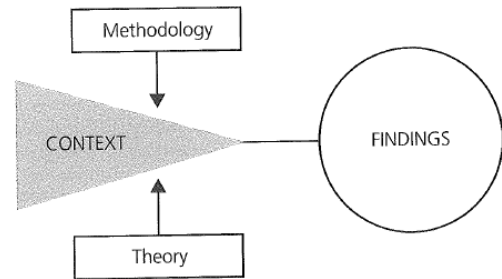


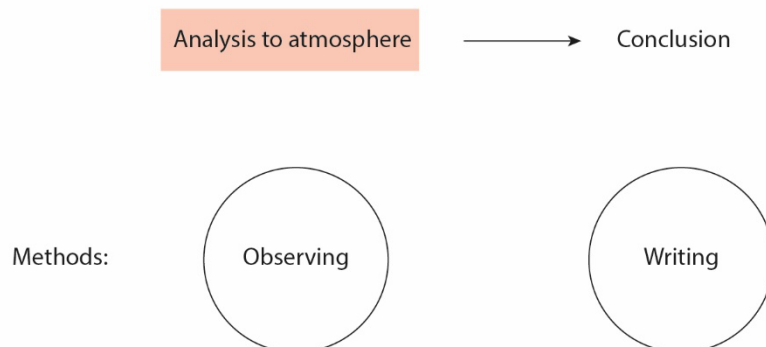
Figure 6. Diagram illustrating context-led research (Lucas, 2016, p. 12)

III METHODS RESEARCHING ATMOSPHERES

The research to atmosphere in space is a well-researched topic in the architectural field. Though, it is also a difficult topic to do research on. Atmosphere is in many cases created by a personal feeling or perception. In this paragraph different researches, which focus on atmosphere in places will be analyzed and compared with each other.

According to Havik (2019), before the analysis of the atmosphere in a space can start, the space first has to be visited and perceived by the researcher, in order to get a feeling of the atmosphere. During the fieldwork, different methods of analyzing the atmosphere can be used. Venturi (1977) is clear about the way mapping doesn't work as a method to analyze the atmosphere on a site. The atmosphere is most of the time created in the image of the site, the animation, decoration and iconology create the atmosphere. An example of one of the methods which do work, is literature. Literature has the power to create the image of an entire city in the mind of the reader. It can give identity to a space, which makes it a great method to communicate the findings on atmosphere to the listener or reader (Havik, 2019). One of the architects who used literature as a way to communicate his findings was the German architect August Endell. In his book 'die Schönheit der großen Stadt' (1908), he describes the way the big, crowded city of Berlin can be beautiful in its own way. With descriptions of different places, such as Potsdammer platz and Branderburger Tor, he gives the reader a feeling of the atmosphere in these places. The way Endell writes, is a text with a lot of descriptive words; a tree is not just a tree, a tree is balding tree which allows the light to entre. With these descriptive words, an idea of the atmosphere is put in the minds of the reader.

Figure 7. Diagram for the used methods in Endells research. (own image)



Gordon Cullen (1971) used a different method for his analysis of atmospheres in places. His research started with the aim to manipulate the elements of a town which could achieve an impact on the emotion of the visitor. In other words, Cullen wanted to find out if manipulation of elements in a town could change the perception (read atmospheric feeling) in this space. Cullen started with the idea of Serial Vision, which means that although the walking speed of a pedestrian walking through a city stays the same, the scenery keeps changing and creates a series of (surprising) changes. These changes in the scenery can also be understood as changes in atmosphere. Cullen defined the changes in atmosphere in three categories:

- Optics; the change in scenery which creates a surprise effect
- Place; concerned with our reactions to the position of ourselves in the situation
- Content; concerning the fabric of the situation (color, texture, style, character, scale, etc.)

With these elements in mind, Cullen made a series of drawings where only the necessary elements were shown, to show the effect of these elements on the atmosphere in the places. In this case, the method used, was observing where after the observations were drawn with some sort of abstraction.

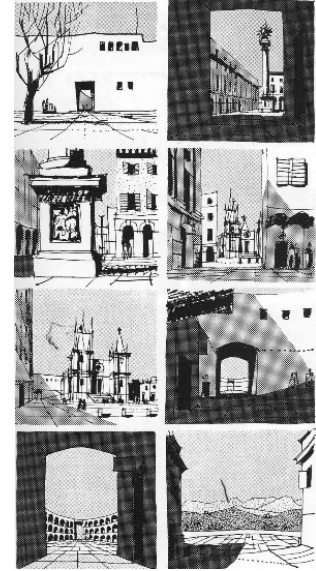
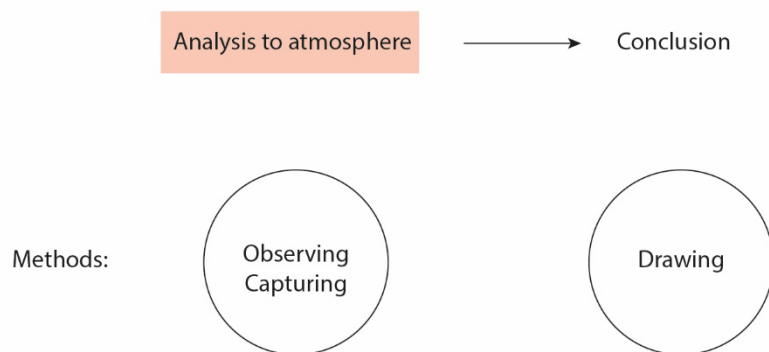


Figure 8. Serial Vision of Cullens research (Cullen, 1971, p. 17)

Figure 9. Diagram for the used methods in Cullens research. (own image)



Both researches from above used the method of fieldwork. Being physically at the space gives one the opportunity to take in the atmosphere and have the perception of being there. As said before, atmosphere is created by perception, which is something you feel when you're physically around. So, fieldwork is the most necessary part of the research to atmosphere.

The difference in the researches, is the way the findings during the fieldwork are put to paper. Where Endell put his perception on paper by words, Cullen expressed the atmosphere with drawings, where he focusses on only the elements he had divided beforehand.

There's a lot to be said about the methods used in the researches from above; because atmosphere is such a difficult research topic, it is also hard to find methods where the atmosphere can be explained well. With literature, as same as with drawings, there is always a form of bias in the research, where the finds some elements more important than others (Havik, 2019). In Cullens research, three main focus-elements are explained, on which the research and methods are based. With these elements the research is structured, to become as less biased as possible. Though, as Havik said, atmosphere is a subjective thing, it is created by subjective feelings, which makes it impossible to get the bias all the way out.

IV POSITIONING

In every research into atmosphere, a fieldwork or perceiving of the site is needed to get a hold of the atmosphere in spaces. The way of putting the observations to paper, is a matter of choice in method. With literature, it is easy to create a vision in the readers mind. With the right use of words, the atmosphere of a space can be explained very well. Though, the method of literature cannot be taken for granted. A lot of thought has to be put in the way a place is describe. Every extra word has a new impact on the way the reader perceives it. The method of drawing might be 'easier' to communicate the atmosphere of a place. With drawings, the images is already made for the perceiver, he doesn't have to create the image himself, which is the case when he reads a text.

The methods used in my own research have great similarities with the research of Cullen. With observations of the space, an abstracted drawing is made with only the elements put in where the focus laid during the fieldwork. The difference between the two researches, is that Cullen drew in Serial Vision; drawings of different places in the researched sites where all elements are put in that one drawing. My own drawings are separated in the different elements, which don't create the overview of the elements combined in the space. The way Cullen chose different points in the space he wanted to analyze and make drawings where all three of his elements stand out, could be adapted by my own research. Instead of working in three different elements, the choice of putting those elements together and get a full view of what the atmosphere exist of, might make the story more clear.

Depending on how you look at the research of atmosphere, one method can be more useful than the other. When the goal of the research is to bring the atmosphere to the reader/listener, so they can feel it without being there, literature might be the best method to use. With this, people will form their own image/perception of the atmosphere, the same as what would happen if these people were physically in the space. But for the goal of my research done in the studio, where I wanted to find the reason for different atmospheres in different places, the method of visualization with abstraction may be the best option. The way where the extra step of capturing the observations with photographs was added, might be the best option in this case. With the photographs, all the activity, materiality and functionality was captured in the moment the picture was taken. With this, an overview of the situation was made and with these observations, the drawings summarized the observations.

What can be concluded from this research is that the methodology of researching atmospheres always contains the fieldwork and perceiving of the atmosphere itself. After that, the methods may differ per research. The way the perceiving is put to paper has a big impact on the story you want to tell in your research. Literature can be used as a more descriptive method in, for example in an analysis to what the atmosphere is like.

The drawing method Cullen used is a great way to analyze the atmosphere according to a set of elements. The abstraction of the drawing is the way to make the story clear. Eventually, this abstraction matches with the concluding drawing from the research to atmospheres in Skopje. What can be taken from Cullen's research, is the way the findings from different themes are put in one drawing, where as in the concluding drawings from Skopje are separated by theme. One overall drawing can be useful for the overall conclusion.

The statement of Venturi, where he talked about the reasoning of mapping not being a great method for research of atmospheres can be refuted in my case. I used the method as a starting point, to get to know the context of the sites better. Venturi is right that the method of mapping doesn't tell enough about the atmosphere itself, but it still was quite a good way to get more background information of the sites which would later be visited.

We can conclude that the methods used in the research of atmospheres in different sites depend on the main goal of the research. Literature, as well as drawing are a great method to communicate the findings. In the case of the research in Skopje, drawing might work better to tell the story. Fieldwork and perceiving the site which is analysed is necessary in a research to atmospheres. During this fieldwork, it might work to create some focus points so the research is a bit narrowed down. To get

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more information about the context of the sites, mapping might be a good option, even though it doesn't say much about the atmosphere itself.

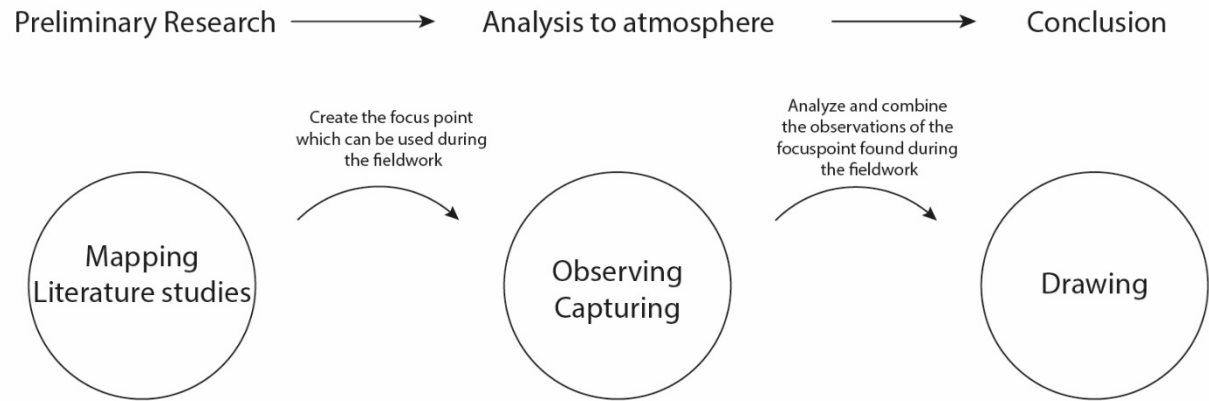


Figure 10. Positioning for the methodology of analyzing atmospheres (own image)

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