

Document Version

Final published version

Licence

CC BY-NC

Citation (APA)

Triggianese, M., Sádaba, J., Moreau, L., Ciuccarelli, P., Kaan, C. H. C. F., Vrachliotis, G., & Risueño, M. (2026). Reframing Practice: Architectural Design Research and the Expanding Role of the Architect. In L. Simeone, C. M. Gray, A. Verhoeven, A. de Götzen, Y. Bakırlioğlu, H. Zohar, M. Stead, & P. Buwert (Eds.), *DRS 2026: Editorials Design Research Society*. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.212>

Important note

To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable).
Please check the document version above.

Copyright

In case the licence states "Dutch Copyright Act (Article 25fa)", this publication was made available Green Open Access via the TU Delft Institutional Repository pursuant to Dutch Copyright Act (Article 25fa, the Taverne amendment). This provision does not affect copyright ownership.
Unless copyright is transferred by contract or statute, it remains with the copyright holder.

Sharing and reuse

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download, forward or distribute the text or part of it, without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license such as Creative Commons.

Takedown policy

Please contact us and provide details if you believe this document breaches copyrights.
We will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Jun 8th, 9:00 AM - Jun 12th, 5:00 PM

Reframing Practice: Architectural Design Research and the Expanding Role of the Architect

Manuela Triggianese

Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, The Netherlands

Juan Sádaba

University of the Basque Country, School of Architecture, Spain

Lee Moreau

Northeastern University, College of Arts, Media and Design, Boston, United States; Other Tomorrows, Boston, United States

Paolo Ciuccarelli

Northeastern University, College of Arts, Media and Design, Boston, United States

Kees Kaan

Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, The Netherlands; KAAN Architecten, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/drs-conference-papers>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

Citation

Triggianese, M., Sádaba, J., Moreau, L., Ciuccarelli, P., Kaan, K., Vrachliotis, G., and Risueño, M. (2026) Reframing Practice: Architectural Design Research and the Expanding Role of the Architect, in Simeone, L., Gray, C. M., Verhoeven, A., de Götzen, A., Bakırlioğlu, Y., Zohar, H., Stead, M., and Buwert, P. (eds.), *DRS2026: Edinburgh*, 8–12 June, Edinburgh, United Kingdom. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.212>

This Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the DRS Conference Proceedings at DRS Digital Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in DRS Biennial Conference Series by an authorized administrator of DRS Digital Library. For more information, please contact library@thedrs.org.

Authors

Manuela Triggianese, Juan Sádaba, Lee Moreau, Paolo Ciuccarelli, Kees Kaan, Georg Vrachliotis, and
María Risueño

Editorial: Reframing Practice: Architectural Design Research and the Expanding Role of the Architect

Manuela Triggianese^{a*} Juan Sádaba^b, Lee Moreau^{c,d}, Paolo Ciuccarelli^c, Kees Kaan^{a,e}, Georg Vrachliotis^a, María Risueño^d

^a Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, The Netherlands

^b University of the Basque Country, School of Architecture, Spain

^c Northeastern University, College of Arts, Media and Design, Boston, United States

^d Other Tomorrows, Boston, United States

^e KAAAN Architecten, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

*Corresponding author e-mail: m.triggianese-1@tudelft.nl

doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.212

Abstract: Architecture extends far beyond the design of buildings and cities, engaging with environmental, technological, and societal challenges. As practice evolves, so must the research that supports it. This theme track examines architecture's expanding role in collaboration, communication, and service, positioning it as a research-driven discipline and a tool for inquiry, innovation, and responsiveness to communities and stakeholders. Operating across systems, social processes, and technological infrastructures, architecture is increasingly understood as an interdisciplinary practice. The track strengthens Architectural Design Research by addressing its evolving methodologies and its role in knowledge production. Contributions explore co-creation, artificial intelligence, data as design material, and practice-based approaches, alongside theoretical reflections on design processes. Together, the papers frame architecture as an open, relational, and collective mode of inquiry, in which architects act not as sole authors but as participants in dynamic networks of actors, tools, and knowledge.

Keywords: Architectural Practice, Research by Design, Design Tools and Methods, Integrated Knowledge.

1. Introduction

Architectural practice extends well beyond its traditional boundaries of designing buildings or cities. As its scope expands, the research that supports it must evolve in parallel. This track addresses architecture's growing role in collaboration, communication, and service, particularly in response to pressing environmental, technological, and societal challenges.

Despite its foundational contribution to design research, architecture, and urban design fields remain underrepresented in major academic forums, with only 2 of 56 tracks at recent



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

Design Research Society (DRS) conferences directly engaging them (Geofrey and Ciuccarelli, 2021). At the same time, design practices are increasingly research-oriented, positioning architecture as a medium for inquiry, communication, and innovation (Sádaba and Arratíbel, 2025). It is also being reframed as a service-oriented discipline that responds to the needs of communities, stakeholders, and environments (Harvard, 2025). Foundational concepts in design research, wicked problems (Rittel et al., 1973), primary generators (Darke, 1979), reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983), and design heuristics (Rowe, 1987) are also revisited within these expanded conditions. Meanwhile, tools such as data visualization, artificial intelligence, and simulation are increasingly understood as active contributors to the design process rather than passive instruments (Vrachliotis, 2022). The integration of computational and distributed technologies further reshapes design processes, introducing new forms of agency, interaction, and knowledge production (Dorne, 2022).

These developments reflect a broader transformation in which architecture is no longer defined solely by its outputs, but by its modes of engagement, its capacity to mediate complexity, and its place within wider cultural and scientific discourses.

Architecture must be understood not only as a professional practice but as a mode of inquiry capable of producing situated, relational, and transferable knowledge. In this context, ‘activating’ design entails ‘curating’ knowledge as a dynamic process of communication, collaboration, and choice (Colombo et al., 2026). It pertains to engaging with systems, spatial conditions, and social processes, often drawing on disciplines such as sociology, ecology, engineering, and the arts. This raises a critical question: to what extent do these evolving practices already constitute Design Research?

Re-engaging with design research, and in particular strengthening the foundations of Architectural Design Research, are therefore essential. This calls for renewed attention to methods, processes, and the epistemic conditions under which design operates. The track responds to this need by repositioning design as a shared language, a platform for research, and a vector for transformation.

2. Reframing Design Practice in Architecture

The track brings together contributions that both expand architecture’s role in interdisciplinary contexts (Swissnex, 2023) and critically assess the current state of architectural design research. It is structured around two interrelated strands: the first examines architecture’s evolving role within multidisciplinary collaboration, while the second focuses on Architectural Design Research itself, addressing its current condition, methodological foundations, and future trajectories.

The papers engage with the following themes:

- Exploring how to re-establish Architecture and Urban Design in Design Research, fostering cross-disciplinary collaborations.
- Examining Design as a Universal Language, reshaping professional roles and responsibilities in architectural and urban practice.
- Investigating Real-world Design Processes and the roles of AI, data visualization, and simulation as active collaborators.

The first group of papers explores how architectural practice is being reshaped through collaboration across disciplines, sectors, and forms of expertise. *Christoforetti and Witt* examine shifting notions of architectural intelligence, showing how data and artificial intelligence reshape both expertise and responsibility. *Veloso et al.* demonstrate how carbon data can function as a design material, repositioning architects as integrators of complex, multi-scalar information within collaborative processes. *Harvey* introduces the concept of practice-as-paradigm, framing architectural practice as an ethical and affective mode of inquiry grounded in participation and relational knowledge production. *Tan and Karakiewicz* revisit the design studio as an epistemic laboratory, where wicked problems are reframed through iterative processes of reflection-in-action rather than simply resolved. *Saldarriaga* offers a situated perspective through the Atlas of Emotions, positioning architecture as a relational practice engaging territory, memory, and collective experience.

The second group of papers turns more explicitly to Architectural Design Research as a field, focusing on how knowledge is generated, structured, and communicated through design. *Rout et al.* analyze the position of architectural design research within broader academic contexts, identifying its fragmentation while outlining its potential as an emerging and strategic domain. *Sloan* examines detailed design practices through the lens of Actor-Network Theory, highlighting the distributed network of human and nonhuman actors involved in architectural decision-making. *Hila and Dorthheimer* explore how diagrams in architectural publications evolved from exploratory design tools into digital communication visuals, requiring new practices. *Annemans et al.* investigate co-creation processes spanning design, healthcare, and cultural institutions, highlighting how roles and expectations are negotiated within transdisciplinary teams. *Triantafyllidis and Huang* conceptualize design as an interface within circular systems, proposing the Circular City Twin as a platform for feedback-driven co-design across scales.

3. Conclusions

Taken together, the contributions in this track point to an ongoing reconfiguration of Architectural Design Research. Rather than following a single trajectory, this transformation is characterized by a plurality of approaches united by a shared concern: how architecture can engage meaningfully with complexity in a rapidly changing world.

Across collaborative practices, data-driven methodologies, participatory approaches, and theoretical reflections, design emerges as an open, situated, and collective mode of inquiry. Architecture, in this sense, operates as a connective discipline, linking scales, domains, and forms of knowledge. The role of the architect is not diminished but repositioned, shifting from author of a closed process to participant in an evolving network of relationships among actors, tools, and forms of knowledge.

This track, therefore, not only reflects on the changing nature of architectural practice but also underscores the need to reconnect more strongly with Design Research. It calls for greater engagement with methods and processes, and for the development of a more coherent and informed body of knowledge. In doing so, it reaffirms the critical role of architecture in articulating pathways toward unforeseen futures, where its integrative capacity is more necessary than ever.

Acknowledgments: We sincerely thank all reviewers [Manuela Triggianese, Juan Sádaba, Lee Moreau, Paolo Ciuccarelli, Kees Kaan, Georg Vrachliotis, María Risueño, Francesco Aletta, Nils le Bot, Eytan Mann, Angela Rout, Yagiz Soylev, Omer Faruk Agirsoy, Berta Bardí Milà, and Daniel García-Escudero] for their constructive feedback and valuable suggestions, which helped improve the work presented at the DRS conference in the track 4.2 Reframing Practice. We are grateful for the new academic partnership established by this track, which aims to reposition Architectural Design within the Design Research Society community. We also thank the Design Research Society for accepting this contribution, and the track chairs for initiating this interdisciplinary collaboration. AI tools were used solely for English language editing and spelling correction.

4. References

- Darke, J. (1979). The primary generator and the design process. *Design Studies*, 1(1), 36–44.
- Dorne, F. (2002). Through, for and by design: A framework for practice-led research. In A. Boddington et al. (Eds.), *Design research in the UK*.
- Harvard Design Magazine 52: Instruments of service*. (2024). Harvard University.
- Geofrey, S., & Ciuccarelli, P. (2021–2022). *Design vocabularies: The Design Observatory research project*. Center for Design, Northeastern University, College of Arts, Media and Design.
- Colombo, A., Kaan, K., Soylev, Y., Triggianese, M. (2026). *Building Narratives: Instances from the Architecture of Dialogue*. nai010 uitgevers. <https://doi.org/10.59490/mg.141>
- Rittel, H. W. J., & Webber, M. M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4(2), 155–169. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01405730>
- Rowe, P. G. (1987). *Design thinking*. MIT Press.
- Sádaba Fernández, J. A., & Arratibel, Á. (2025). From intuition to inquiry: Reframing architecture's role in design research. *VLC Arquitectura. Research Journal*, 12(1), 281–314. <https://doi.org/10.4995/vlc.2025.22940>
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
- Swissnex & Other Tomorrows. (2023). *The expanding scope of design*. Boston & New York.
- Vrachliotis, G. (2022). *The new technological conditions: Architecture and design in the age of cybernetics*. Birkhäuser.

About the Authors:

Manuela Triggianese is Associate Professor in the Complex Projects Group at TU Delft. Trained in architecture, with academic positions in Venice, Beijing, and AMS Institute, she advances practice-based architectural research that promotes design as a mediating instrument in multi-stakeholder collaborations.

Juan Sádaba is an architecture researcher and designer focused on climate adaptation, urban biodiversity, and Research by Design. His work explores multispecies, multisensory, and social innovation approaches, developing methodologies and projects that integrate ecological thinking into resilient, forward-looking urban environments.

Lee Moreau, Architect, Professor of the Practice of Design at Northeastern University, and Founder of the Strategic Design studio Other Tomorrows in Boston, United States

Paolo Ciuccarelli is Professor of Design and Founding Director of the Center for Design at Northeastern University. Trained in architecture, chair of Communication Design program at Politecnico di Milano, he investigates how data visualization and design research reshape multidisciplinary collaboration.

Kees Kaan is an architect with nearly 40 years of experience in practice, cofounder of KAAN Architecten, and Professor of Architectural Design at TU Delft since 2006. He initiated the academic group Complex Projects on large-scale architecture and civic ambition.

Georg Vrachliotis is Head of Architecture Department and Professor of Theory of Architecture and Digital Culture at TU Delft, leading the Design, Data and Society Group, and serving as Editor-in-Chief of The New Open magazine on architecture and data literacy.

María Risueño, Architect and Lead Design Strategist at Other Tomorrows in Boston, United States