

# DIVERSITY IS DYNAMIC

## Exploring new ways of doing

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## I INTRODUCTION

Research can inform the design in many ways, and at many times in the design process.<sup>1</sup> Within the architectural practice and education, we are constantly involved with various forms of research. During the education architecture, students use a variety of research methods. These methods strongly influence the way the world is being viewed and thus determine the outcome of the design project. Being aware of the way we understand, think and act is there for crucial in any design process. It creates a better understanding of what design projects are about, and as importantly, what not. Secondly, as architects, we have a responsibility to address societal issues accurately. Challenges of the built environment such as sustainability -to name an example- concern the complexity of technical, social, organizational and political issues, they require holistic solutions. Designs should be an answer to a range of issues, related to a wide variety of disciplines. Research, as part of the design process, should, therefore, be designed. Awareness of the research methodologies allows us to make conscious and informed decisions regards research methods.

Through the lectures of this course, I was introduced to various methods and ideas on how to do architectural research. It has offered me a broader understanding of viewing architecture and the city. The knowledge I have gained during this course on the underlying assumptions, implications, and the various research methodologies made me reflect on the different methods I have used -consciously or subconsciously- during my education. As such, it has revealed the underlying assumptions I have had within previous design projects. This has definitely resulted in a somewhat more sensitive approach during my thesis research in particular regards analyzing information. Secondly, the lectures inspired me to explore different techniques for processing information.

What opened my eyes was the critique of the reductive understanding of typology. Typology is to my knowledge, despite the extensive debate amongst researchers over decades, reduced to its formal aspects by many students as well as tutors at this faculty. Even though I struggled to grasp the various concepts discussed within the lecture on type and typology, it offered me insights in ways to use a more '*generative notion of type*' within architectural research.

My graduation studio is "1 million homes" of Architectural Engineering. The studio is aimed at efficient and sustainable housing solutions in Amsterdam in a context of urbanization. It is concerned with systems and approaches to solving the housing need.

My project looks into the interaction between newcomers and the city. The Dutch asylum-support system is anti-integrative due to the lack of autonomy and the segregation of newcomers within asylum seeker centers. Secondly, diversity and inclusion are major challenges for the built environment. The biggest cities within the Netherlands are becoming increasingly socio-cultural diverse. This is due to current trends of urbanizations and population growth due to migration. My overall research question is: '*how to create inclusive living environments that facilitate integration in the long term?*'. The objective is to create a strategy for the integration of newcomers within existing neighborhoods in cities. Integration here is defined as 'a two-way process of change, which relates both to the conditions for- and the actual participation in all aspects of daily life, as well as the newcomers own sense of belonging'. In essence, my project is about the emancipation of newcomers throughout the different stages of the integration process.

Integration is a cross-disciplinary field, which has gained major attention over the last decades, particularly within social sciences. However, even within social science, the concept remains controversial and subject to considerable debate.<sup>2</sup> There is not one definition, theory or model for the integration of newcomers. As a result, the potential responses are endless and the overall amount of

<sup>1</sup> Linda N Groat and David Wang, 'Architectural Research Methods', n.d., 480.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Lucas, *Research Methods for Architecture* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2016).

these responses is neither architectural or spatial. In this particular case social sciences, however, offered some valuable perspectives. Lucas points out that “Different perspectives allow you to think differently about places”.<sup>3</sup> However, the translation towards potential spatial approaches is challenging, yet necessary.

## II RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

Within the first phase of the design project gaining a broad understanding of the accommodation of newcomers was of importance. Two case-studies have played a major role in informing my design project; 1) a case study of an asylum-center in Leersum, 2) a case study of various architectural projects which have involved end-users within the process. Findings from the first case study where the starting point of the second. Both involved combined strategies. Knowledge gained during the case study of the asylum center allowed me to position myself towards current approaches of the accommodation of newcomers. Whereas the second case-study supported the progression of my design project with potential practical ‘tools’ and strategies related to the process. The combination of these two, therefore, offered a way to get engaged with distinctive problems, yet allowed me to produce results with certainty. 1) context-orientated (problem) 2) the challenges when involving users within the project process.

### ASYLUM CENTER

According to Wang one of the characteristics of a case-study is “studying a case in relation to the complex dynamics with which it intersects and from which the case itself is inseparable”.<sup>4</sup> I wanted to investigate the (broad) question: *What is the role of the architecture of the asylum-center for the integration of newcomers?* The objective was to create a deeper understanding of the current conditions, the underlying (social) systems which influence these conditions, and how the socio-physical dynamics in turn shape the experience of newcomers. Therefore the case-study was both explanatory and exploratory.

In this case-study the context was examined as a ‘type’, an example of conditions found elsewhere. The context here does not relate to the physical context, but rather to ideological/societal context (the asylum support system) in which the Dutch asylum center is located.

Within this case study, an extensive literature review was conducted in order to suggest what data should be collected and to develop criteria for analyzing the data. Next to this, it involved an inquiry on the *societal* concept of integration and the asylum-support system. Wang, however, argues that the theory development, in this case, has some “equivalent to the notion of hypothesis”.<sup>5</sup>

Within this particular case-study, I sought a balance between emic and etic. Observations were made from the ‘outside the activity’, as well as the ‘inside the activity’. ‘The complexity is often revealed by research in the emic mold’.<sup>6</sup> The data sources included archival work; local news-articles, the examination of plans of the transformation over the last decades, the examination of the program of demands, and correspondence between the mayor and the minister relating the housing approaches of newcomers. Tools that were applied involved interviewing, diagramming and photography. An interview with the team-leader real-estate was particularly valuable in gaining insights into current approaches of the organization. In addition, several (short) interviews with residents were conducted and observations were made during a site visit. McPherson addresses Foucault in order to illustrate how stories from the ‘liminal’ perspective offer an important source of inspiration for new perspectives on the dominant ways of doing and thinking. Revealing these stories, therefore, allows for questioning

<sup>3</sup> Lucas.

<sup>4</sup> Groat and Wang, ‘Architectural Research Methods’, n.d.

<sup>5</sup> Groat and Wang.

<sup>6</sup> Lucas, *Research Methods for Architecture*.

the current approaches towards the accommodation of newcomers.<sup>7</sup> Insights, therefore, have the potential to offer new perspectives in a search for new perspectives which could stimulate the current situation.

### USER-INVOLVEMENT

The objective of the case study was to explore the different strategies of user-involvement in the realization of dwellings. In particular, I wanted to investigate this question: *How do strategies of user-involvement for the realization of dwellings support users in adapting the conditions of their dwellings in order to meet their comprehensive needs and wants?* The focus of the study was on the technical aspects as well as aspects related to the development process. My overall research methodology derived from a combination of literature and case studies. Literature informed the research in several ways; 1) the goals of user-involvement 2) the supporting theory for the framework for the categorization of user-involvement. The categories included; the degree of user-involvement<sup>8</sup> (process related), time-span covered by user-involvement (project phase) and the level of involvement (related to functional and formal aspects). For the case studies, the type of user, length of stay, design intention and site were considered. The cases revealed various strategies as well as a broad range of challenges and practical aspects that come into play when involving users within the realization of dwellings.

This research, however, was not only to explore the various 'types' and strategies of user-involvement. It was also intended to explore the possibility of proposing an (updated) model for user-involvement within architecture.

### III RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Within this course, I became interested in 'typology'. According to Wang, a characteristic of typological analyses involves "analyzing multiple complex variables in order to illuminate broad categories of spatial relationships and formal attributes".<sup>9</sup> The objective here is to identify the combination of variables which together define the broad categories of 'type'. Type, as an architectural solution, could be seen as a form given by ideological, social and cultural demands.

However, currently the research method 'typology' is generally not viewed as the most relevant. There doesn't exist a common approach towards typological research. Jacoby problematizes the 20th centuries notion of typology "as an interchangeable functional and graphic classification".<sup>10</sup> The Modern Movement deliberately reduced the 19th centuries notion of type to avoid its connotations with style. Jacoby argues that in the 1960s the extensive effort to revitalize the methodology failed due to their inability to overcome this 'reductive notion' of type.<sup>11</sup>

Integration is broadly misunderstood as a process of *cultural adaptation* in which newcomers become new members of society.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, various researchers within social science have pointed out that integration is a process of unequal power-relations. The lecture on typology introduced me to

<sup>7</sup> Melinda McPherson, "I Integrate, Therefore I Am": Contesting the Normalizing Discourse of Integrationism through Conversations with Refugee Women', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 23, no. 4 (1 December 2010): 546–70.

<sup>8</sup> M. A. Kaulio, 'Customer, Consumer and User Involvement in Product Development: A Framework and a Review of Selected Methods', *Total Quality Management* 9, no. 1 (February 1998): 141–49,

<sup>9</sup> Linda N. Groat and David Wang, *Architectural Research Methods* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Sam Jacoby, 'Typal and Typological Reasoning: A Diagrammatic Practice of Architecture', *The Journal of Architecture* 20, no. 6 (2 November 2015): 938–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2015.1116104>.

<sup>11</sup> Jacoby.

<sup>12</sup> E. Sengers and J. T. Sunier, *Religious Newcomers and the Nation State. Political Culture and Organized Religion in France and the Netherlands* (Eburon, 2010), <https://research.vu.nl/en/publications/religious-newcomers-and-the-nation-state-political-culture-and-or>.

Foucault's analytical tool 'Heterotopology' (I have consulted the lecture notes). With regards to the socio-spatial aspects of integration, the architecture of asylum centers functions as a '*dispositif*' (technical apparatus) for the normalization of newcomers. For Foucault, the form of 'modern institutions' -here the built form of asylum centers- is produced by society, and in its turn the form produces society. The form is something that renders visible the 'power relations'. For Foucault, investigating 'types' within the built environment thus helps to reveal the social relationships which have produced the 'type' within a certain assemblage. A diagrammatic view on the formal aspects of the asylum center here could function as a tool to investigate the 'social assemblage'.

#### IV POSITIONING

Architecture can be viewed as a projection of values. Writing in Hunch Magazine in 2010,<sup>13</sup> Tom Avermaete points out that after the second world war there was renewed interest in the social and societal dimension of buildings. He argues that although postwar architects questioned the status quo, it resulted in a rich field of architectural positions and approaches: "it can be argued that the different approaches describe the contours of a new professional figure, who is not an exclusive artistic genius serving a private client but rather an inclusive engaged architect playing a public role". By mapping the different roles, Avermaete illustrates how the different public roles can inspire contemporary architectural discourse and practice. In doing so he addresses the concept of the French philosopher Louis Althusser of the 'semi-autonomy' of the different levels of *practices* of social life. Avermaete argues that a public role requires finding a balance between working within the rationales of discipline, and stepping out of these borders and engaging with other logics. Individuals can be political, but their architecture can't.<sup>14</sup>

My position towards the accommodation of newcomers is that rather than encouraging conformity, newcomers should be regarded as agents with potential. This resulted in a quest for potential approaches to empowering newcomers to influence the conditions of their dwellings in order to meet their needs by making use of their full potential. Seeking to empower newcomers to take part in the formulation and realization of architecture, my position is related to what Avermaete addresses as the architect taking up a public role as 'facilitator'.<sup>15</sup>

Post-war architects taking up the public role as 'facilitator' have used various approaches in order to engage users. Habraken was a researcher who investigated mass housing and strategies for the participation of users and residents within the process. Within his book '*de dragers en de mensen*'<sup>16</sup> proposed an alternative, intended to restore the natural relationship between buildings and dwellers. He advocates for an approach in which the state provides the physical infrastructure, the 'support'. This 'support' provides space for people to build their own houses. This structure defines the "*rules of the game*".<sup>17</sup> Support here also has a figurative meaning. The role of the architect here is to provide dwellers with the technical solution. Thus, for Habraken participation is about handing individuals tools.

<sup>13</sup> Tom Avermaete, "The Architect and the Public: Empowering the People in Postwar Architecture Culture", in Hunch. The Berlage Report on Architecture, Urbanism and Landscape, No.14, 2010, Pp. 83-95.'

<sup>14</sup> Avermaete.

<sup>15</sup> Avermaete.

<sup>16</sup> N. J. Habraken, *De dragers en de mensen : het einde van de massawoningbouw* (Stichting Architecten Research, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> N. J. Habraken, *The Structure of the Ordinary: Form and Control in the Built Environment*, ed. Jonathan Teicher, Revised edition (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2000).

From a similar perspective, Jonathan Hill points out in his paper *The use of architects*<sup>18</sup>, that users are always involved in the realization of architecture. 'To use a building is to make it, either by physical transformation, such as moving walls or furniture, by inhabiting it in ways not previously imagined or by conceiving it anew'.<sup>19</sup> Hill addresses the concept of flexibility, as a concept which offered a way of dealing with the contradiction between the expectation of use and the reality that the architect's involvement in a building ceased at the moment that occupation began. Hill points out that each building model and design strategy suggests a specific way of being involved within the formulation of architecture; 'passive', 'reactive' or 'creative'. Using both design strategies as well as building models to suggest a creative use, allows the user to take up a role which is equal to that of the architect.

Rather than viewing buildings as static entities, Hill and Habraken view buildings as processes in which individuals take part. The building model shapes the way individuals are involved. From this point of view, the transformative character of buildings is of main importance for allowing individuals to control their environment.

Here could a newly emerging approach within architectural design, Design for Disassembly, potentially give valuable input. Design for Disassembly is a method for the life cycle design of buildings and building products. It is aimed at providing technical solutions in order to increase the transformation capacity of buildings. From a sustainability perspective, it advocates for a shift of viewing buildings an ongoing interdependent, self-sustaining dynamic process.

Viewing the built environment as a set of social practices opens up opportunities to restructure these processes. As such, designers can adapt their approaches in order to meet the comprehensive needs of newcomers. The social sciences and design science can offer valuable perspectives on processes of commissioning, designing, and occupancy within projects.

Concluding, due to the inherent complexity of the concept of integration the potential responses are extremely varied. There is not one right approach. However, integration as a *two way* process of change requires the built environment to adapt to the needs of newcomers. Diversity is dynamic. In order for cities to remain open and vital in the long term, buildings should no longer be viewed as static. Newcomers should be regarded as agents with potential. Therefore it is necessary to explore "other ways of doing". Within my design project, I explore the possibility of new ways newcomers to be involved in the formulation of their environments.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Hill, 'The Use of Architects', *Urban Studies* 38, no. 2 (1 February 2001): 351–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980123765>.

<sup>19</sup> Hill.

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