

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION REDUCING DISTANCE TO GET FAMILIAR

Reduce distance to get Familiar

Student

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V I REDUCING DISTANCES TO GET FAMILIAR

An architectural assignment requires different approaches and research analyses to ultimately arrive at a substantiated design. Research requires awareness and expertise to recognize the organized analyses and systems that provide, direct or define information for any architectural discussion that ultimately leads to growth or development. (Hernandez, J.M., 2019) Methods help organize thoughts, data, and facts and provide awareness. If you know what you are doing, you also know where you want to go. The awareness of research methodological is very important, because if you are aware how you gained your data you can validate your conclusions. (Lucas, 2016, pp. 36)

This lecture series has given me more information about the different methodologies that are available. In addition, I learned a lot from where my chosen methodology comes from and what its history is. But most of all it has brought me to think carefully about why I am researching things and how. Why do you use a specific method and to which methodology do they belong? The methodology that appealed to me the most was the lecture on Praxeology. I recognized many methods and underlying thoughts in which I am interested. This methodology also comes in handy in my studio. I also applied some methods presented during the lecture in practice during my stay in a nursing home.

For my studio I do research into innovative ideas for housing for the elderly in the Netherlands. My own research is about reducing the distance between different users with emphasis on the elderly in combination with others. The research question is: **To what extent could reducing distances between users or space trigger a form or spatial design that create a sense of belonging and familiarity among people through the lens of elderly?** I came up with this question during my stay in an elderly home. From my own experience, the distance between the elderly and others, including myself, is very large. This means that you have less to do with each other, know less about each other and this means that the distance is getting bigger all the time. The institutional buildings have a kind of imaginary "boundery" around their building, difficult to get in and to get in touch with the elderly. In the book "most people are good," Rutger Bregman argues that the threshold that people would do more for each other has to do with distance between people. If you are farther away from someone you are less attempt to do something for the other. (Bregman, 2019). And with this distance comes fear of the ignorant "ignorance frightens the unknown." By reducing the distance you create a sense of belonging and familiarity with each other. And this means that you would rather help someone, which means that the care would be partially relieved.

II GETTING TO KNOW ELDERLY BY ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

My research questions are: **To what extent could reducing distances between users or space trigger a form of spatial design that create a sense of belonging and familiarity among people through the lens of elderly?** In this research question I mean with *Distance*: Physical, mental and social distance. By *Belonging* I mean that you feel that you are seen, heard and feel appreciated. And By *Familiarity* I mean that you get familiar with one another, with the higher goal that by getting familiar you would do more for one another.

To answer this question, I chose to do ethnographic research. Ethnography is a methodology based on observation. Observation is the most primary source of information. (Gobo, 2008) In addition, use is made of conversations with the actors 'on stage', documenting (reports, diaries, photos, letters or audio materials), doing individual or group interviews, whereby the higher goal is always observing actions as they are in a specific setting. Ethnography is an in-depth research of a culture or group of people. The main action is participated to live in the context for an extended period of time. Here is *Participant observation* the main activity in the methodology. (Lucas, 2016, pp. 38-39)

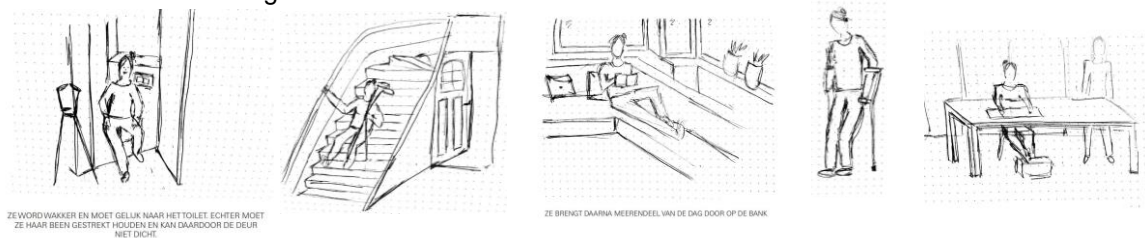
The presence of researchers in practice gives a better picture of the user, their views, the meaning of their actions and behaviour. The consequences of this methodology are not only theoretical but also

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practical, because a better look at the routines and practice of the users means that you can come to solutions to social problems which leads to better proposals and sketches which ultimately leads to better design. (Andreoni et al., N.pp. 2)

If we then look at the literature and methods given, this approach to research fits in with methodology: Praxeology. Praxeology is "The study of human actions and behaviour. The built environment as a stage for daily practice." (Berkers, M, 2019)

For my research I started with various assignments in which I observed the behaviour of the elderly or care needed people. For example, I spent a day with someone with a care need and I sat down in a public space where many elderly people come. I have recorded this Participant observation by doing methods such as taking notes and sketches.



Images 1 : Observations of a day in a life of a care needing person.

After these assignments in the first few weeks, I spent a week in a nursing home for my research. In this week I observed the elderly, but also other target groups. In this week research has been done on different scales. On human, House, Building and Neighbourhood scale.

On human scale I talked with different people and documented how their day looks like. Participated in various activities in the building and of course the daily coffee moments. The methods that I used to document human scale activities are having talks with residents, making notes and interviewing several people. These methods I have used to make day schemes (analyses) or several people or several ages living in the nursing home. Below you can see as an example of one of the day schemes of the several people that I have spoken, observed and investigated. Below this day scheme are the conclusions that I have drawn from this study.

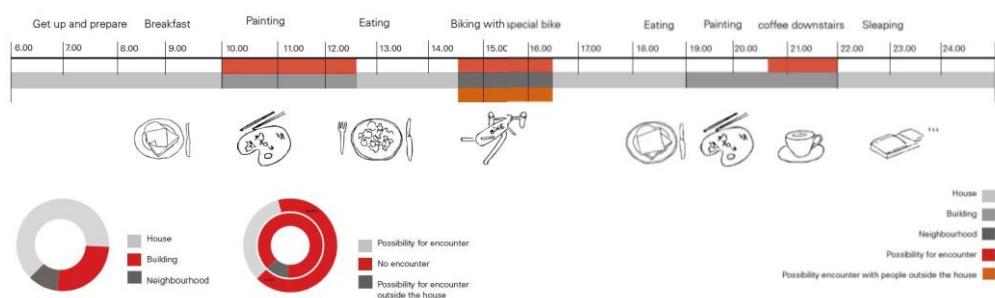
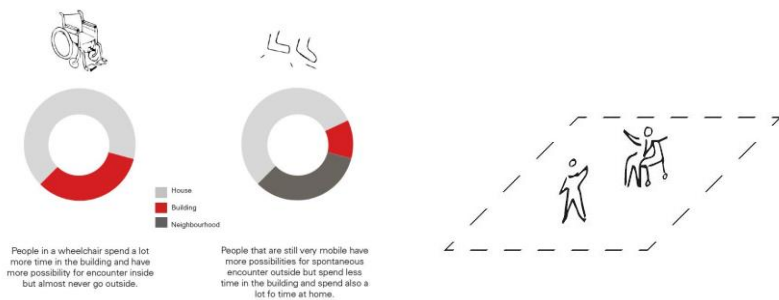


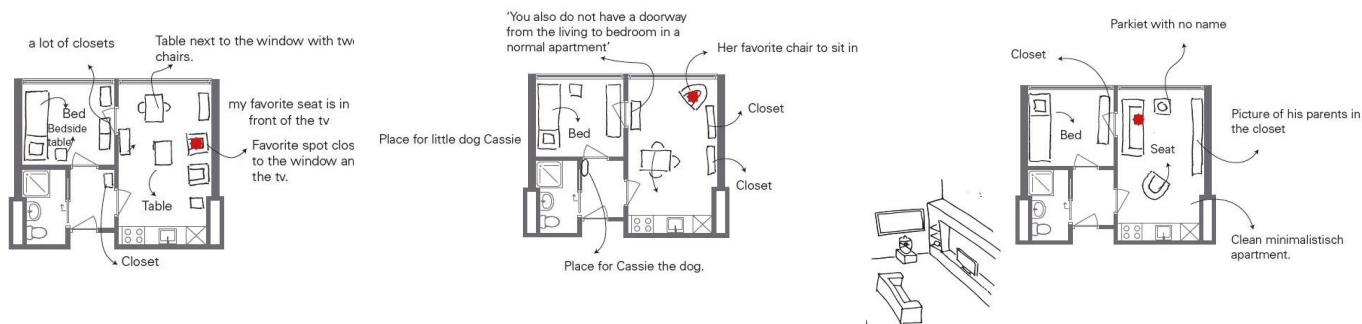
Image 2: Example of one of the day schemes I made during my observation week.

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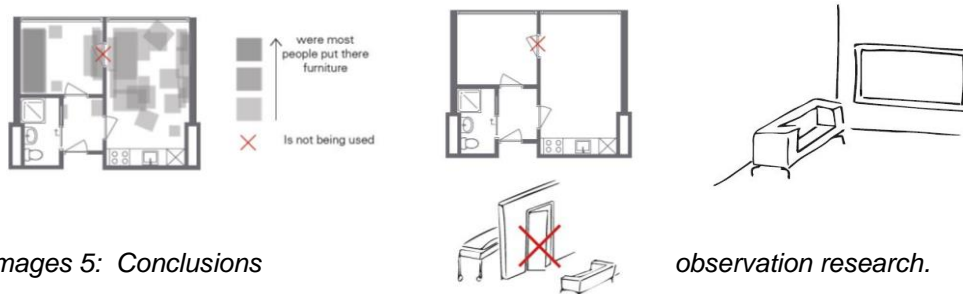
Images 3: Conclusion observation day schedules residents care home. How often do they spend where in and around the house? Design guideline is; Design space where the spontaneous encounter is stimulated, both inside and outside.

On the scale of the house there has been research done. Below there are images of a small selection of the plans that I have drawn from sketches. In these plan you see the notes, where the residents love to sit and the interior lay out is shown.



Images 4: Floor plans with notes, interior position and where the residents love to sit.

After documenting, conclusions were drawn. These can be seen below. Here you can see that the interior is mostly located on the edges, that the door between the living and bedroom is not being used and that the most favourite spot to sit is close to a window.

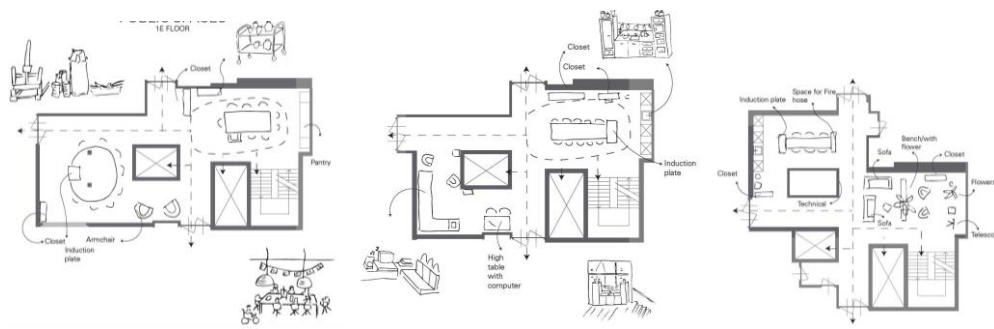


Images 5: Conclusions

observation research.

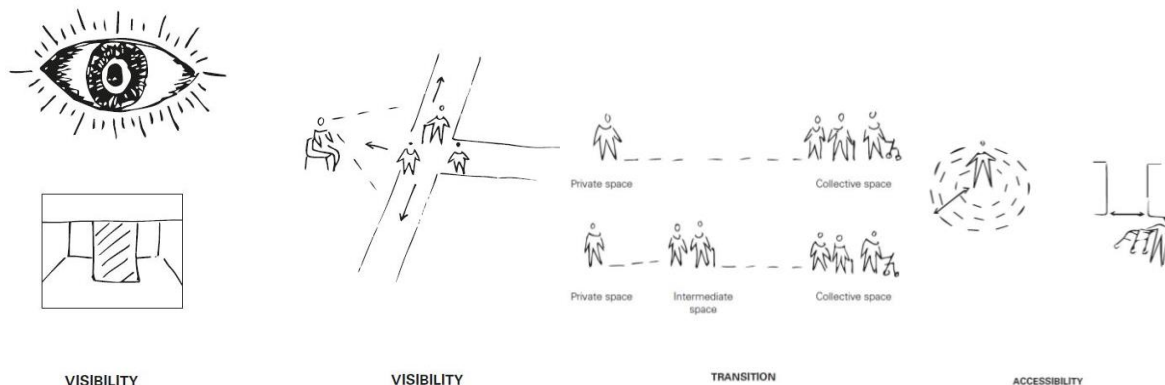
On a building scale, research has been done into public spaces; why are some public spaces within the building used and others not? Here I used different methods, namely creating floor plans, sketches and notes. Below here there is a selection of the several plans that has been made. In the plans shown below you can see that the walking route is seen, notes and the interior lay out.

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Images 6: Public spaces

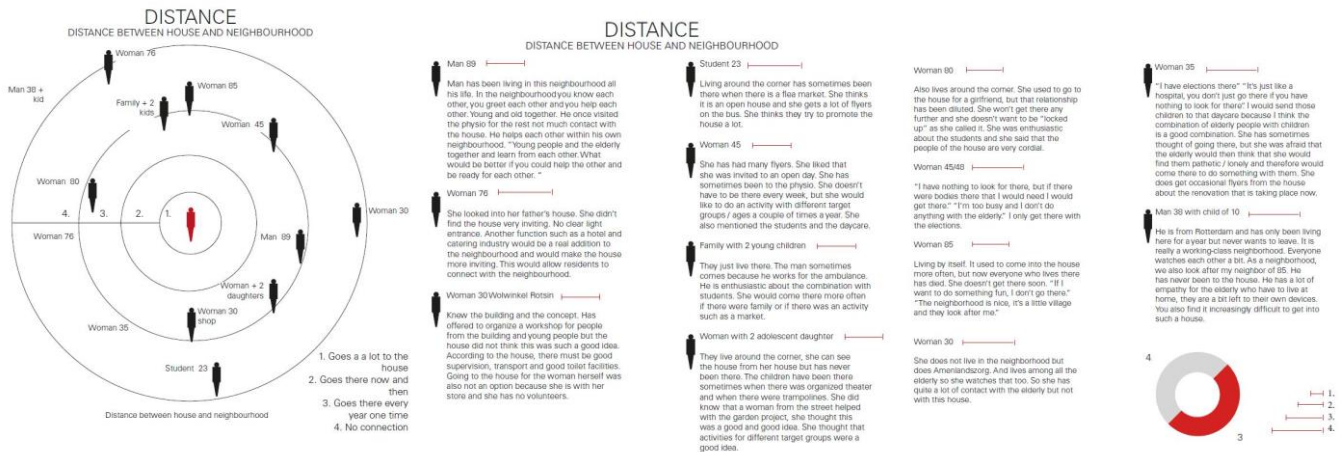
After documenting the public spaces and making flow maps by experience the public spaces on several moments during the week on different times. I could draw some analyses and from that make some design guidelines. The research has shown that the visibility of the public spaces is very important. If the public space is behind an 'obstacle' they are less likely being used. There should be a better transition from private-, to intermediate-, to public space and the accessibility of the public space also determines if the public spaces is being used.



Images 7: Design guidelines public spaces

At last I did research on the neighbourhood. Where are all the facilities, what are the distances and what are the obstacles for care needing people in neighbourhood. But I also talked to people in the neighbourhood and their relationship/ distance with the people that are living in the house. By using the method of interviewing I got a better view of the distance between the neighbourhood and the people that live in the house. What was interesting is that almost everyone knew the house but nobody visited the house. Only on selection day 50% of the neighbours has ever come there because the selections were taking place there. From several neighbours the reason was that it is a dark entrance, not welcoming and because of its institutional appearance they didn't feel that they were welcome to visit.

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Images 8: Research about distances between the neighbourhood and the people living in the nursing home.

Unfortunately, buildings are still being designed these days where the user of the building is hardly taken into account. Doing Ethnography research ensures that you gather knowledge about the user and his or her needs. How do they live, what do they use, what do they need? What makes their house a home? Since my research is about the elderly, this research is particularly important. I believe that if you can design for the elderly you could design for everyone. Elderly people are increasingly in the news nowadays because of the growing group of elderly people in the world. This will not change in the coming years. Healthcare will soon not be able to handle everything. A new innovative approach is therefore needed. If I want to get an answer to this, I must first find out the needs of the elderly, the needs of the caregivers, but also the other target groups. My challenge is designing space where all the needs of all different users are satisfied.

III THE BIRTH OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

The birth of ethnography methodology dates from the period between the late 19th century and early 20th century. Ethnography separated from the traditional anthropology methodology in the late 19th century. Before the advent of ethnographic methodology, ethnologists did not collect information by observing. They examined statistics, the government offices and missions archives, travel reports, archaeological finds, indigenous manufacturers, objects of exotic art, talked with travellers, explorers and missionaries. The anthropologists saw these members of indigenous peoples as "primitives" and could not be used as a direct source of information. They found them not to be trusted because they did not provide objective information. (Andreoni et al., N.d. pp.2)

The English anthropologist coming from Poland Bronislaw K. Malinowski (1884-1942) is considered the first to systematically apply Ethnographic methodology. In his book about his research about the Melanesian Archipelago in the Trobriand Islands off the coast of New Guinea, he describes in his introduction the methodological principles that underlie the main purpose of ethnography, namely understanding the native's point of view. (Malinowski, 1961)

Malinowski introduced an view "from within" that American anthropologists of the 1950s called the "emic" perspective, as opposed to the "etic" or comparative perspective, useful for the analyst but not necessarily important for the members of the culture studied. (Andreoni et al., n.d. pp. 2)

The ethnographic methodology has been included in sociology since the 1920s. This approach is taken over by economists, psychologists, scientists and most recently also by designers. The demand for observation and Ethnography today is increasing in many sectors of society.

In early 90s Ethnography has been picked up in designing since the 'turn of the social' source and the 'interpretive' approaches of social scientists. This is eventually picked up by designers that the

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development of interactive technologies is increasingly depend on the social conditions in which systems are being used. Ethnography gives the design a good understanding of people and how they experience there live. (Andreoni et al., n.d. pp. 2)

Today ethnographic research is increasingly being used in Architecture. For example in 2018 There was a whole exposition about Architecture Ethnography at the Venice Architecture Biennale. The Japan Pavilion presents 42 drawing projects that has to do with Ethnographic research. The goal for this exposition was "to develop and deepen the discussion about life and architecture, the role of architecture (and)our society in the future." Commissioned by the Japan Foundation, Architectural Ethnography is curated by Momoyo Kaijima, co-founder of Atelier Bow-Wow and a professor at ETH Zurich; Laurent Stalder, ETH professor and editor of *Atelier Bow-Wow: A Primer*; and Yu Iseki, curator at Art Tower Mito. The exposition is subcategorized into four themes: *Drawings of Architecture*, *Drawings Among Architecture*, *Drawings for Architecture* and *Drawings Around Architecture*. The exposition shows the way drawings can grasp the qualities of a space and how it is being used. (Hill, 2018)

IV ARCHITECTS SHOULD DO MORE ETHNOGRAPIC RESEARCH

For my studio, ethnography is an excellent methodology to apply. Determining the behaviour, needs and lifestyle of the elderly is going to give me information about how these people want to live. This is also necessary because I cannot imagine being an older person now because I am 25 at this moment and not in need of care. Without ethnographic research I cannot find out their needs and I cannot make a good design for the elderly. However, there is also criticism on Ethnography research. The methodology highly depends on the perception of the researcher. And that is why there is a change that the reality can be altered because of the perception and understanding of a particular researcher. A researcher also often works alone, so there is no one present who can check the findings for reliability. (Frost, 2011)

The data collected must be validated and checked. This could be done with literature research. In addition, the time that ethnographic research requires is seen as one of the disadvantages. But this disadvantage is almost unimportant since you do gather concrete good information with this methodology. ("When and How to Use Ethnographic Research," n.d.)

So for me it was not only a matter of relying on a moment recording, but checking my own data multiple times at different times and with different people. I did this during my week at the nursing home. I have observed, spoken and experienced different spaces, people, and moments and from this extensive analysis I have drawn conclusions / design guidelines / tools.

I believe that if you are not relying on just one time or one person but you do an in-depth investigation with different people from different target groups, situations and origins, you will get a broader view and would certainly be able to extract well-understood design guide Lines from the data. I do believe that the use of Ethnography research alone is not enough. In addition to the ethnography methodology, you must read literature about this target group and their needs. Also typology research into different types of housing for the elderly provides a well-founded investigation. After my stay in the nursing home I got to know the people and their needs but also defined the problem. With defining the problem I could draw my research question (reducing distance to become familiar with each other) with which I could continue. I only believe that just that week in the nursing home is not enough to come to a well-founded investigation. This research question asked for more research to answer all the sub questions that came with defining the problem/question. Not only more Ethnographic research but also Literature research.

So after defining I went back to the nursing home to do more ethnographic research, I did literature research into my focus / target groups and I visited other homes to arrive to substantiated answers. In addition, further research into the location with neighbourhood research through a survey is needed to get a better grip on the context, their residents and needs within the location. In addition to the research on the location, also form studies, research on the program and reading literature about

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concepts and form are needed to arrive at the first possible forms. The guidelines from the research on the location, Research on the program and form study will ultimately be used to arrive at a concept design. The investigation will not stop afterwards. In addition, further research will be needed during my design process.

I find it surprising that many architects do not do any ethnographic research at all. Ethnographic research is the perfect methodology to gather information about the user of the building that you want to design. Often this is investigated briefly by architects by doing a brief literature research on there user and if you're lucky they do a short neighbourhood study after the plan is almost finished where the opinion of the neighbourhood is asked. In my opinion this is too late. If you do ethnographic research at the start of the process you can really understand the user and create a better grounded design. " Ethnographic research is particularly suitable for early stages or a user-centred project that deals with particularly complicated or critical design challenges. This is because ethnographic methods allow a particularly deep understanding of a design issues domain, audience (s), processes, goals and context (s) or use. " (When and How to Use Ethnographic Research, "n.d.)

I believe that a good Architectural Research consist out of different components for example; research about the location, form studies, literature research, typology research and research about materials. But one of the most important component is research about the users. Architects designing ultimately for the users so that is why it is so important that the architect understands the user and the given problems and challenges. I believe that otherwise you cannot make a good design that satisfies the needs of the user.

V LITERATURE

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