

Position on Design Driven Research

Matthias Ballestrem, Prof. Dr., HCU Hamburg

Design-driven research (DDR) aims to understand individual architectural design products as a specific form of knowledge. Intuitive, divergent, non-linear ways of thinking are an integral part of the scientific process in DDR. The results, be it buildings, drawings, models or else, are themselves multirelational. They are open to interpretation and address and touch multiple dimensions of our environment and life.¹

Architecture is a foremost sensual art. Its modality is spatial experience.² Knowledge in architectural design therefore is encribed in space and space-defining artifacts. In DDR, designing itself is applied as a method and the design results are understood and described as scientific findings. Due to this nature of the disciplinary language, knowledge in the results and processes of design will not be fully accessible through terms and texts—it will remain blurry and open to signification and interpretation.

Methods of DDR therefore function more like focal lenses that enable us to approach, identify and name specific themes and practices in design work. They will help to explicate their origins and their effects in the designs, the design process and eventually in the designer.³

This reflection has two trajectories. First, it will impact the researchers as designers by making their individual implicit ways of designing explicit and thus making it possible to understand and improve the rigour and quality of their designs.

Secondly, knowledge production through DDR will make it possible to relate specific work to its community of practice and to relevant architectural theory and history. Hence, they will build a body of practical and theoretical knowledge that is actively forming our habitat and beyond that make it accessible to be built upon and reflected on by other disciplines.

Next to the necessity to provide the missing scientific framework for a third cycle academic qualification in design as the core expertise of the design disciplines,⁴ DDR is contributing to the integration of intuitive individual knowledge, expertise and problem-solving in the scientific discourse. The value and significance of design results lies in their individual contribution to the cultural dialogues in society. DDR should accordingly be regularly discussed and evaluated by a diverse group of peers.⁵ Critically differentiating the original particularity of projects and practices in this way will impact the design community and eventually our built environment.

Bibliography

Eco, Umberto. 1968. *La struttura assente, La ricerca semiotica e il metodo strutturale*. Milan: Bompiani.

1 “L’architetto si trova condannato, per la natura del proprio lavoro (in cui è costretto a divenire sociologo, politico, psicologo, antropologo, semiologo...) ad essere forse l’unica ed ultima figura di umanista della società contemporanea: obbligato a pensare la totalità proprio nella misura in cui si fa tecnico settoriale, specializzato, inteso a operazioni specifiche e non a dichiarazioni metafisiche” (Eco 1968, 245).

2 See also: Schmarsow, August. 1896. “Ueber den Werth der Dimensionen im menschlichen Raumgebilde.” *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-Historische Klasse* (48): 44–61.

3 Exemplary for this explication is: Rossi, Aldo. 1981. *A scientific autobiography*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

4 Verbeke, Johan. 2013. “This is Design Research.” In *Design research in architecture*, edited by Murray Fraser. Farnham: Ashgate.

5 See also: EAAE. 2012. “Criteria and Characteristics for Quality.” In *EAAE Charter on Architectural Research*. Accessed 7 March, 2018. <http://www.eaae.be/about/statutes-and-policy/eaae-charter-architectural-research/>.