

The Doctoral School

Research Methods I

Empirical Studies
and Interdisciplinary Inquiries

Fall Semester
2022



Università
della
Svizzera
italiana

Accademia
di
architettura

The seminar on research methods is one of the core elements of the Accademia's doctoral school, in which students engage with basic methodological approaches approaches of contemporary research in architecture.

The focus of the seminar changes each semester, and draws on the perspectives of the ISA and ISUP, two complementary institutes which in their respective historical and empirical research represent a wide range of architectural research methodologies.

Evidence-based Design

This semester we will focus on empirical research methods that rely on the inherent capabilities of the architect: expertise, imagination and skill.

Empirical research is not a clearly defined method in architecture per se; rather it indicates fundamental uncertainties in the modes of architectural design. Global challenges such as planetary urbanization, climate change, and the energy transition require the capacity to establish scientific evidence and traceability in design processes, involving both the sensory apparatus of the architect and representational technologies.

Wicked problems posed by new "hyperobjects" lead to an increasingly trans- and interdisciplinary character of the subjects of research at the intersection of "data and things" (Timothy Morton).

Evidence-based design relies on the capacity to make empirical observations in the field and to critically question them.

This semester's seminar is made up of three workshops. Each workshop forms an autonomous unit, integrating presentations and discussions highlighting a specific topic around the notion of "evidence-based design".

Methodologically the seminar foregrounds dense ethnographic descriptions and mapping techniques, representing an urban humanities approach to architecture and urbanization processes.

● **19 October 2022**
10:40-12:25
On methodology and evidence
(In design processes)

Input by
Dr. Mosè Cometta
philosopher at ISUP (ARC-USI)
and Prof. Dr. Sascha Roesler (ARC-USI)

This first session will focus on the first of the two pillars of modern science: the concept of methodology and that of evidence. What does methodology mean? This term designates one of the programmatic foundations of science, that which distinguishes it from other fields of knowledge. Whether humanities, social sciences, or exact sciences, modern science is characterised by an important focus on method. After an initial overall introduction on the concept of method, its usefulness and objectives, a more direct connection to the field of architecture and planning will be drawn. This will be followed by a shared reading of a paper, to comment on its implications. Finally, the session will close with a group discussion on what methodology concretely means in the development of doctoral students' theses at the Accademia, and on the challenges and problems encountered in the unfolding of different research projects.

● **16 November 2022**
09:55-12:25
On design-driven research

Input by
Dr. Lidia Gasperoni
philosopher and architectural theorist
at TU Berlin

What are the main themes and methodologies employed in architectural research? How is it possible to define the epistemological value of methodologies?

These are the main questions we will address during the workshop in an interactive format between inputs, discussions, and diagrammatic reasonings. The purpose of the workshop is to situate research at the methodological level by learning from the different approaches in the group and investigating together the potentials, limitations of different methodologies. We will start from a conceptual point of view, regarding the topics and the knowledge gaps the research addresses and aims to fill. We will move to the point of view of methodologies, comparing different practices in architectural theory and history as well as in design-based and design-driven research. Finally, we will also take the point of view of explicitness, concerning the impact and effects of the knowledge production in architectural research.

● **30 November 2022**
10:40-12:25
On ethnographic approaches
to archives

Input by
Dr. Will Davis, architectural theorist,
Princeton University

Literature on the plantation has proliferated in recent years, linking a set of discourses under the rubric of what Donna Haraway calls the "plantationocene," a historical framework for thinking through mercantile capitalism, resource extraction, settler colonialism, and environmental degradation. What do these terms mean for architects and their practice?

This talk considers the architectural projects of several counterinsurgent warfare officers operators working in Southeast Asia between the 1960s and 1980s between Vietnam and the Philippines and the way that traditional building materials—palm and bamboo—were crucial to both displacement operations and the resistance movement against them.

Assessment and Eligibility

An active participation during the semester will be the basis for assessment.

While primarily designed for doctoral students, a limited number of master level students will be admitted to the seminar. These students applying for the seminar must submit a 200-word motivation statement explaining the relevance of the seminar to their past or future research interests.

Guests

Dr. Will Davis

I am an architectural historian with research interests in histories of traditional knowledge systems, ethnobotany, and insurgent warfare. Currently I am a Princeton Mellon fellow, where I am working on my first book, *Palm Politics: Warfare, Folklore, and Architecture*. My PhD project of the same title was completed at the University of California, Los Angeles in 2021, and received the Society of Architectural Historians David B. Brownlee Dissertation Award for most outstanding doctoral dissertation in the field of architectural history completed during the two years prior to the submission date. I am co-chair of the Society of Architectural Historians IDEAS committee, and an Associate at the Science, Technology and Society research cluster of the Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore. I am a contributing editor at ARDETH (Turin, Italy), and a founding member of ANZA East Africa (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania).

Dr. Lidia Gasperoni

Lidia Gasperoni (Dr. phil.) is a research and teaching associate at the Department of Architectural Theory of the Institute of Architecture at the Technical University Berlin. She studied philosophy in Rome, Freiburg im Breisgau, and Berlin. She obtained her PhD from the TU Berlin and an associate professor habilitation in Italy in the field of aesthetics. She teaches architectural theory and philosophy, with a focus on media philosophy, Anthropocene theories, and design research at the TU Berlin and previously at the UdK Berlin and the University of Kassel. Her publications include: *Versinnlichung* (De Gruyter, 2016); *Media Agency*, with Christophe Barlieb (transcript, 2020); *Artefakte des Entwerfens*, with Anna Hougaard et al. (TU Verlag, 2020); *Site of Coexistence* (IQD, 2021); and *Construction and Design Manual: Experimental Diagrams*, DOM publishers 2022, and *Epistemic Artefacts. A Dialogical Reflection on Design Research in Architecture*, with Matthias Ballestrem (AADR, forthcoming).