

Issue 02/2009

GENERALIST “Research”

call for papers

Over the past several years in the architecture departments of our republic, the issue of research has been discussed more in depth than ever before. This issue has become so virulent not in the least as a result of the federal government’s Initiative for Excellence and the wave of evaluation and ranking that has gone with it. A close correlation between the amount of research funds available and scientific quality, as has been construed within this movement, has ultimately led the issue of research back to a discussion of basic principles in these architecture departments. Unquestionably, one can conduct research about architecture, and one can definitely also do so in a scientific manner that exhibits excellence. Certain aspects of architecture are the objects of cognitive interest that are studied by the most varied branches of science. But what is research in architecture – with architectural means or methods and an architectural cognitive interest? Is there even such a thing? Can architecture itself be a science, or at least a research discipline?

Architecture, as an academic discipline residing between the engineering sciences and artistic disciplines, cannot demonstrate original scientific “methodology” of its own, and its “cognitive interest” is highly diversified and subjected to constant change. Architectural action is mostly result-oriented and, in cases where it is undertaken artistically, often proceeds in an explicitly intuitive way. Architectural knowledge about space, structure, program and form is generated iteratively and remains mostly implicit. A canon of verifiable findings only exists within those branches where one researches /about/ architecture—whether from the perspective of material science, art history, sociology, or building physics. Empirically-substantiated architectural production is nonetheless hardly imaginable.

The mechanism for publishing the results of research is, in contrast to that of other disciplines, not capable of systematic description; the forms of publication are not oriented towards later verification of the results. And – to do justice to modern-day parameters – the university discipline of architecture is endowed with relatively little external funding and can only demonstrate a below-average number of doctorates. Academic titles are not economically relevant on the architectural free market, and the research market within the field is comparatively underdeveloped.

In the course of one’s architectural education, proportionally little scientific work is practiced and little theoretical knowledge is conveyed. Emphasis is placed on the development of skills and operational knowledge. One who has studied architecture is qualified for scientific work to a lesser degree than graduates of other discipline and tends to be educated more as a generalist, without much specialization. The training of an architect as a scientist or researcher is not intended – in

one's ensuing work, a research architect must therefore revert to methodological appropriations from other fields. This situation resembles the combination of architect and engineers in architectural practice, although the research architect who seeks to successfully conduct scientific work must undoubtedly delve much deeper into the respective disciplines than the architect who builds. At this point at the latest, the concept of science must be clearly separated from that of research. What research in architecture means, shall be the subject of the upcoming issue of GENERALIST.

If architectural research cannot be clearly limited through techniques and methods, via education, or through the objects of research, it might be worth making an attempt to more closely examine the nature of the question, the strategy, and the essence of the cognitive interest.

Volume 13, Number 2 of the journal *Wolkenkuckucksheim* already examined the topic earlier this year on an epistemological level, under the heading "Architectural Theory and Science." Currently, preparations are being made for a conference at the RTWH Aachen entitled "Constructing Knowledge"—on knowledge, its production and communication in architecture; the contributions are to be documented in the first two issues of the new journal *Candide*. Both of these contributions to architecture's scientific discourse come from the perspective of architectural theory. In keeping with its basic orientation, GENERALIST wants to approach the subject with a panoramic view and to also give practitioners in particular the opportunity for critical reflection.

Three positions on the topic are identifiable; they form a possible outline for the issue 02/2009 "Research."

1. Architecture is the art of construction and therefore not a science.

An architect who wishes to conduct research must simply bite the bullet by adopting the accepted methods of other disciplines and use them to examine one's own field as an object of research rather than merely perceiving it as a set of tools. Research is conducted about architecture and is *thereof*; dealing with it from *therein*, however, is just as impossible as in music or art. It is essential for the researcher to specialize and to isolate a subject.

2. Architecture indeed researches.

In the sense of Anglo-Saxon research, which does not limit itself to reaching conclusions on defined problems, the architect can indeed function as a researcher. Almost every design is, after all, preceded by a study of the basics in the form of a small investigation of the surrounding circumstances, which is then followed by a proposed solution on the basis of one's own and previously new perceptions. This can apply to both the engineering-related and artistic segments of the profession. If the complexity of the problem at hand is reduced to solely one identifiable segment, then empiricism is also possible within architecture.

3. Architecture will reconstruct its own history of research.

The architectural procedure of oscillating between engineering science and art could well be described as a method and then entrenched. Intuitive approaches for problem solving in complex situations are anything but absurd in this age of an accelerated lack of comprehensibility; other sciences already work methodically with the acceptance and reflection of one's own subjectivity (e.g. "participant observation" within sociology). Alongside empirical evidence and quantitatively collected results, every science also notably needs the speculative, intuitive, and creative development of theses and theories, especially for highly complex "wicked problems." Herein lies the strength of architectural experimentation.

It is by no means our intention to turn this issue into a review of projects. Rather, we want to appeal to architects, planners and designers to reflect critically on their own creative/architectural actions. Furthermore, we are also calling upon practitioners and theoreticians of related disciplines to depict a view from outside.

remarks about submissions

The magazine GENERALIST accepts both written and pictorial submissions (text and images). The authors are requested to provide information on image copyrights inasmuch as they belong to others. Drawings and photo series are to be accompanied by explanatory text according to the format guidelines.

The selection process takes place in two phases:

Initially, synopses of max. 700 words (or max. 10 images) are to be sent. After review by the editors and the advisory committee, authors selected for the shortlist will be invited to develop their contributions for publication in the issue. The editorial staff looks forward to a dialogue with the authors.

GENERALIST can only consider one contribution per author. The contribution selection process is not anonymous. Articles that have been previously published are also acceptable, but such cases must be indicated. Regrettably, submissions that do not comply with the stipulated format guidelines cannot be considered. GENERALIST strives to promote a journalistic writing style that also makes the topics accessible to an audience beyond the professional community.

Format guidelines

- The article can be written in German or English
- Title and subtitle
- Short biography of the author (max. 500 characters)
- Author's contact details (postal address, e-mail address, and telephone number)
- Intended scope of the article:
(500, 1,000, 1,500 or 2,000 words, or quantity and formats of images)
- Captions
- Images/graphics as TIFF or PDF in highest quality (min. 300 DPI, min. 10 x 15 cm)
- Image copyrights with contact details
- Bibliography if appropriate

Please send the synopsis in RTF format as an attachment, together with all the information stipulated in the format guidelines, to the following e-mail address: redaktion@generalist.in

The following deadlines are binding:

Submission date for synopses: 30 September 2009

Editorial deadline for completed contributions: 31 October 2009

Please send any queries by e-mail to: redaktion@generalist.in

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