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## **EDITORS' NOTES**

### **OBSERVATIONS ON PHD RESEARCH IN ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2024**

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This mixed issue presents five scientific articles, reviews of two dissertations, and an overview of the production of knowledge in 2024 by PhD students in architecture and landscape architecture. We have identified the number of doctoral dissertations produced at twelve schools in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The search resulted in a total of forty-one PhD dissertations that were defended in 2024. Curiosity was one main reason behind our report, because we wanted to get a basic picture of the knowledge created in the field as viewed through doctoral dissertations in architecture and landscape architecture. The creation of knowledge by PhD students in architecture and landscape architecture are briefly presented in the Forum section below.

The schools' doctoral programmes allow for various types of specializations within architecture as a research subject. Two dissertations have been categorized as being related to conservation. This is a research subject that can be found both inside and outside architecture according to the international classification of research subjects. We have therefore excluded these conservation-related PhD dissertations from our report due to the particular nature of the knowledge produced. It should also be noted that doctoral dissertations produced outside universities or schools of architecture and landscape architecture have been omitted from our presentation in this issue.

The five articles in this mixed issue have authors affiliated with departments and universities in several countries: Denmark (University of Copenhagen and University of Southern Denmark), Finland (Tampere University), India (Piloo Mody College of Architecture), Spain (University of Alicante), Sweden (Chalmers University of Technology, Institute for Language and Folklore and University of Gothenburg), and finally the United States (Texas A&M University and University of Florida).

The first article, by Dr Carmen García Sánchez, is called “Danish Interiors and Echoes from Japan: Strategies for a Nature Connected Spatial Design”. In it, she addresses and examines how spatial interior design functions as a basis for experiences in relation to the phenomenon of nature in four post-war buildings in Denmark. The case studies in the article highlight experiential values linked to biophilic design strategies and experiences, and its theory and practice. In addition, the impact of traditional Japanese architecture and an updated understanding of post-war Danish domestic architecture from a current perspective are explored and discussed, thus shedding light on the influence of traditional Japanese architecture on post-war Danish architecture and helping to decipher its complexity. The article’s approach contributes to highlighting not only biophilia as an evaluation tool, but also the potential of Japanese architecture as a method for evaluation at the same time.

The second contribution is titled “Investigating Housing Challenges of Graduate Students and Exploring Infill Micro Housing”. The authors of the article are Dr Ahmed K. Ali, Dr Rohit Kumar, and Dr Patricia Njideka Kio. In this contribution the team focusses on the often-unknown but dire residential situation for graduate, professional degree, or doctoral degree students, such as homelessness or sleeping on a friend’s couch as temporary solutions, or experiencing severe housing insecurity in general, something that is seldom depicted or addressed in housing research. Furthermore, the team attempts to introduce innovative architectural design components for suggested building construction projects on-site to be offered to single-parent students with children. The study is based on a similarly rare survey and has resulted in local data involving 1,500 respondents, providing a precise mapping of students’ actual residential situation and preferred desired future housing solutions. Taken as a whole, the research is firmly based on the assumption and confirmed hypothesis that residential conditions are tightly linked to the capacity to conduct, finalize, and succeed in higher degree university studies. The topic addressed here is thus of crucial strategic importance for fostering societal academic qualities as a whole, a strategy that gives architectural concepts a key role at the forefront of future campus-based exploratory actions.

The third article is “Purpose-built, grand or central mosque? A conceptual discussion of mosque typology in Scandinavia” by Dr Helle Lykke Niel-

sen, Dr Tove Rosendal and Dr Maria Löfdahl. In the article, they examine the term “purpose-built mosque”, which is often used in the Scandinavian research literature. In the article, the authors argue for a rethinking of the frequently used terminology and propose a more consistent, transparent, and updated terminology that shifts the focus from the building perspective to the function and status of large mosques. The authors propose replacing the term “purpose-built mosque” with a more nuanced and updated typology, as well as a terminology that goes beyond solely physical structures. Key categories with words like “grand”, “central”, “Friday mosques”, and “multipurpose cultural centres” are suggested for an updated terminology that shifts the focus from the building perspective to the public function and status of large mosques.

The fourth article is “The Accessibility Activism of the Disability Rights Association Threshold, 1973–1982” by PhD student Marja Rautaharju. Architectural accessibility has developed since the mid-twentieth century as a result of activism demanding changes to the law. However, according to Rautaharju, the history of accessibility has remained an understudied topic in the Nordic countries, particularly in relation to the disability rights movements. The Finnish disability rights association *Kynnys* [Threshold] was founded in 1973. Rautaharju studies the association’s activism during the first ten years of its existence. Simultaneously, with the formation of the association Finland also received updated legislation. New buildings with public services now had to provide access to mobility-impaired persons.

Threshold’s activism is studied in relation to the histories of accessibility, social movements, and the construction of the welfare state in Finland, with references to international research on accessibility and disability history. Rautaharju points out that accessibility has been widely discussed by the association as a disability political issue—not as an individual medical problem. This transformation made design and politics central to the debate. Architectural knowledge becomes important for the development and implementation of design solutions supported by progressive legislation. Viewed within an architectural discourse, the activists have articulated the need for user-centred accessibility expertise. The disability rights movement has also been recognized for its contribution to the emergence of concepts for making public spaces accessible such as “Universal Design” and “Inclusive Design”. The key findings in the article suggest that architectural activism and the association’s design thinking interpret low accessibility and barriers in the built environment as a political and human rights issue. Architecture and urban design for ageing welfare societies are both confronted with challenges that can learn from the activism driven by disability rights movements.

The fifth and final article in this issue is “Digital Tools for Early Participation in Urban Planning Processes: Situating Knowledge Through a Prag-

matist Approach”. The authors are Dr Marco Adelfio, Dr Álvaro Bernabeu Bautista, Dr Jaan-Henrik Kain, and Dr Jenny Stenberg. They examine the use of digital tools for engaging residents in the early stages of urban planning in suburban Gothenburg (Sweden). The residential buildings there are from the 1970s, and the neighbourhood is being subjected to a planning process that undermines the current status quo by boosting densification and gentrification. In this article, digital tools are tested by the research group so as to collect inhabitants’ suggestions for improving the location and proposals regarding the functions and qualities they would like to add to the planning process. While the article does not provide a replicable toolbox, the research group nevertheless attempts to show how communication functions in a specific location and that the advantages and disadvantages stem from the use of specific tools. The research strategy can be summarized in three epistemological principles of pragmatic approaches: 1) Actionable knowledge applied in a research context; 2) Development of relevance for a local context; and 3) Mixed methods embedded within the choice and use of digital participatory tools (MapX, Decidim, social media). The findings suggest that the effectiveness of digital tools for early citizen participation depends on the use of situational knowledge and on how they are applied to a specific situation. This is not surprising, as the overall experience is that digital tools need to be combined with analogue outreach activities and local mobilization.

## Forum

This section of the journal includes three contributions:

The first contribution is a review by Professor Janina Gosseye, Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, Delft University of Technology, where she heads the Building Ideologies Group (BIG). She reviews the dissertation “Queer as a City: Unsettling Coherence in ‘Sustainable Urban Development’” produced by PhD student Alva Zalar, Lund University. The university appointed Professor Janina Gosseye as an external examiner for the public assessment of the dissertation, as is typical in Nordic countries.

Author: Alva Zalar

Title: *Queer as a City: Unsettling Coherence in “Sustainable Urban Development”*

Publisher: Department of Architecture and Built Environment, Lund University

The second contribution here is review by Professor Catharina Nolin, Deputy Head of the Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University. The dissertation she reviews, whose title can be translated as “Norwegian Garden Art Towards a Modern Society – 1930-50: Intentions

and *Ideals in a Time of Change*”, is in the Norwegian language. The author is PhD student Berit Rønsen at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences. Professor Catharina Nolin was appointed as first external examiner by the university for the public assessment of the dissertation.

Author: Berit Rønsen

Title: *Norsk hagekunst mot et moderne samfunn – 1930-50. Intensjoner og idealer i en brytningstid* [Norwegian Garden Art Towards a Modern Society – 1930-50: Intentions and Ideals in a Time of Change]

## Dissertations

The third and final contribution in the Forum section is the abovementioned presentation of doctoral dissertations completed in 2024 in two subject areas: architecture and landscape architecture. Forty-one doctoral theses in these fields were registered in Finland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden in 2024. Iceland is missing in the list. The reason for this is simple: There is no university in Iceland that has doctoral programmes for examining theses in architecture and landscape architecture.

To ensure the correct number of dissertations, the administrations behind the PhD studies were contacted in case of uncertainty. We are therefore confident about the result. However, the examination can be criticized for being somewhat uncertain regarding architectural research. We may have missed a small number of dissertations, since the examination did not include doctoral dissertations produced outside the schools and/or departments of architecture and landscape architecture. However, this demarcation line hardly affects the content of the knowledge production presented in our overview below.

