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CREATION OF NEW KNOWLEDGE

DIALOGUES INSIDE AND BETWEEN DISCIPLINES

Editors: Anne Elisabeth Toft and Magnus Rönn

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INTRODUCTION

Anne Elisabeth Toft and Magnus Rönn

NAF/NAAR has always had an interest in surveying and critically discussing the power systems or regimes that frame and direct the research being carried out in the Nordic countries. As an association of researchers in architecture, it quite naturally focusses on architectural research—including research in landscape architecture, urban planning, and design studies.

PhD research has been addressed in many NAF/NAAR symposium proceedings publications and the discussions in this volume are specifically related to them, most notably to the 2013 volume, *When Architects and Designers Write/Draw/Build/? a PhD*, with its focus on research by design, and the 2018 volume, *The Production of Knowledge in Architecture by PhD Research in the Nordic Countries*.¹ Specific to the latter publication was its interest in pursuing architectural research and the notion of it as a social, cultural, and political construct.

Formalized doctoral programmes in architecture are a fairly recent phenomenon. In Europe—including the Nordic countries—such programmes have only existed since the early 1990s.² They were introduced when demands in society led to a need for higher education to be research-based and for educators teaching at the university level to have a PhD degree.³ This generated a need to include research as an activity in creative fields like design and architecture, thus developing them from fields of practice to fields of inquiry.⁴

By analysing the educational programmes of the PhD schools in the Nordic countries, one can grasp a picture of what constitutes the students' research educations: what courses they are offered, what methods and theories they are taught, and what discourses and practices dominate their learning. The epistemological starting point provided by their education conditions their research and research results. It shapes their understanding and concept of architecture, as well as their understanding of research and what it can be.

Despite the common perception that the educational systems in the Nordic countries are relatively alike—and that there are more similarities than differences behind their ideologies—this legacy is today contested. A closer look at the educational programmes of the PhD schools in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland that offers PhD degrees in architecture reveals that they are quite different from one another. By building on different academic traditions and pedagogical models, they represent diverse approaches to PhD studies, and to how research should be conducted. Furthermore, their research is based on different funding models, which leads to diverse priorities in a large number of areas. The particular funding model is, for example, decisive in the individual PhD student's choice of research topic.

In a globalized, neoliberal society, there seems to be little common understanding of canon or critical discourse. What defines architecture, its discipline, and the concept of architecture is today widely being questioned or reconceived at universities and schools of architecture. At the same time, there are many other disciplines that have an interest in architecture; disciplines that want to capitalize on it and its practice, to appropriate its name, methods, and theories. Within the educational system, new disciplines formalize while old ones disappear or merge with other disciplines. This is instrumental in changing or expanding the narrative of many traditional disciplines such as architecture. The complex contemporary challenges facing our society are as encompassing and differentiated as those, for example, related to Artificial Intelligence (AI) or the Anthropocene. These challenges also entail crucial redefinitions of the role and responsibility of the architect, leading to novel research interests and methods for researchers in architecture. Without doubt, the architectural profession has always brought many different disciplines together, and architects have always collaborated with peers from other professions. However, due to the radical transformation of the work of architects in recent years, not only the need for transdisciplinary collaboration and interdisciplinary thinking seems to be growing. The definition of the concept of transdisciplinarity and what it entails has also become a decisive issue for the discipline to discuss.

Working beyond bodies of inherited disciplinary knowledge challenges educational institutions and their curricula, also including PhD schools and their programmes. It puts them in what seems to be an epistemological dilemma, since different research cultures and regimes set different standards

for what counts as knowledge and research, based on different methodological approaches and theories. In order to find expression, emerging thoughts and new knowledge must speak in the terms of the established disciplinary discourses, whilst simultaneously breaking away from them and their legacies and norms.

Against this backdrop—and prompted by its collaboration with the PhD School at the Royal Danish Academy in Copenhagen—in 2023, NAF/NAAR decided to look at PhD research in architecture in the Nordic countries through the lens of transdisciplinarity. Understanding architectural studies as a diverse, dynamic, and growing relational field, transdisciplinarity in this context means that many different sciences (anthropology, sociology, geology, et cetera), crafts, and creative arts can be relevant to architecture and its knowledge production depending on the focus of the specific research.⁵

Transdisciplinarity and interdisciplinary thinking inform the curriculum and the pedagogical approach at the PhD School at the Royal Danish Academy. The school offers courses in the fields of architecture, design, and conservation.⁶ And students can embark on either a PhD in academic research or a PhD in artistic research.⁷ In cooperation with NAF/NAAR, it wished to discuss societal and educational changes and to pursue the intellectual capacities, values, and skills that transdisciplinary studies foster. With the symposium in 2023, NAF/NAAR and the PhD School at the Royal Danish Academy thus aimed to address the multitude and diversity of current research practices, and how the PhD programmes for architectural research in the Nordic countries embrace the notion of transdisciplinarity. The symposium also wanted to illuminate how transdisciplinarity and interdisciplinary thinking shape the production and outcome of PhD research, and to learn how working in transdisciplinary collaborations or with transdisciplinarity *per se* is experienced by PhD students.

To frame the discussions, NAF/NAAR and its collaborating partner invited three international keynote speakers: Tim Anstey, Professor of Architectural History at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design and Director of the school's PhD Programme; Albena Yaneva, Professor of Architectural Theory at the Politecnico di Torino and Adjunct Professor at GSAPP, Columbia University; and Saija Hollmén, Professor of Practice in Humanitarian Architecture and head of the Aalto WiTLAB at the Aalto University School of

Arts, Design and Architecture. As they come from different discursive backgrounds, but are all involved in academia and the management of education and research, each of them reflected on the theme of the symposium from their perspectives.

Discussions during the symposium were structured in three tracks. Under the broader theme of transdisciplinarity, the objective of track one was 'to encourage the doctoral students to reflect on their target group for the PhD project and on how the results are intended to be used'.⁸ Track two invited the doctoral students 'to describe and reflect on the transdisciplinary nature of the research problem in their PhD project, exploring how they communicate with other disciplines and understand the contribution of architectural research to society'.⁹ Track three focussed on 'how financial and organizational conditions influence PhD projects, the research findings, and how the results are presented'.¹⁰

Although the collection of texts in this book reflects the discussions in the symposium, the articles are not structured according to the three tracks. Rather, the book has—and this might be regarded as a symptom of the topic discussed in the symposium—a heterogeneous structure organized in two parts: Section I and Section II. The first consists of the articles by the three keynote speakers and the second of articles by PhD students, with a total of nine contributions. By structuring the book in this way, separating the written contributions by keynote speakers and those by PhD students, Section I creates a conceptual framework for Section II.

Not surprisingly, the articles and essays in the publication vary in terms of subject areas, research issues and approaches, as well as theories and methods. And the authors in Section II of this book also interpreted the theme of the Call for Papers for the symposium very differently. Among the written contributions, we see roughly three parallel approaches to reflecting on transdisciplinarity in PhD research. Firstly, we have articles that focus mainly on describing, presenting, and discussing the research issues and the frameworks in the authors' PhD projects. Transdisciplinarity, and the concept of it, are often less apparent in these cases. Instead, reporting on research findings and results is central to the contributions. Secondly, we have articles focussing on research methods and their use in the PhD projects. Here, the relationship to transdisciplinarity appears as an underlying issue, but without

being clearly expressed or discussed. Thirdly, we have articles that actively reflect on transdisciplinarity and thus refer to this key concept in the Call for Papers. These contributions point out different expressions of transdisciplinarity, mainly as a need for a kind of joint venture between architecture and other disciplines so as to cope with multidisciplinary research challenges at hand.

SECTION I

Tim Anstey, architect and historian, has worked with PhD education in Norway for many years. In his article 'Learning Outcomes: Reflections on Ten Years of Engagement with AHO PhDs', he gives a personal account of developments at the PhD School at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO) and its programme. Today, the school in Oslo has forty active candidates in its PhD programme, which Anstey is responsible for curating. Although it facilitates many different kinds of students, whose educational background may, for instance, be in service design, industrial design, landscape architecture, urban theory, or preservation and circularity in architecture, it offers one single PhD education programme. New students are required to take a number of courses together. But the school aims to provide a structure that allows for the diversity of 'output, apparatus, and process' associated with the various disciplinary areas in which these candidates operate. Carrying out PhD research means qualifying for practice. And since doing a PhD is a learning process, pedagogic models are, in Anstey's opinion, of relevance when PhD students are to be trained as researchers. In his article, Anstey goes on to reflect on teaching and pedagogic models using concepts derived from pedagogic theory. In addition, in his view, the PhD programme and its elements, research, and definitions of research and research formats, as well as meta-systems such as the 'cost-benefit analysis systems' characteristic of late capitalist systems of investment, shape the research environments and the design of PhD Programmes.

In her article, 'Interference in Architecture: On the Art of "Tormented" Writing and the Future of Architectural Research', sociologist Albena Yaneva urges the architectural researcher to 'perfect the art of architectural writing, to invent *a new syntax*, a new grammar, and new compositional principles for writing'. She criticizes the impact of what she calls dominant research cultures in academia, when she advocates for 'a new form of architectural research' and new research methods. For, according to the author, society's

many complex challenges call for a different kind of architectural research than the one offered by critical theory. The research we need, Yaneva argues, is ‘*an earthly one*’—introducing a ‘realistic’ research approach to architecture arising from within the field of practice—one that remains at close proximity, and not at a critical distance to its objects of research. What architectural research needs more specifically are ‘new methods of enquiry that resonate with parallel developments in diverse fields.’ Drawing on the actor-network theory of French sociologist Bruno Latour, Yaneva explains that a new form of research requires an altered mindset on the part of the researcher, who must rethink the context and processes of innovative knowledge production and what it should actually lead to, as well as why and how.

‘Dwelling in the “In-Between” of Disciplines’, authored by architect Saija Hollmén, offers a discussion of contemporary definitions of interdisciplinarity, as the terms ‘multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinarity’, according to Hollmén, are often confused and the terminology thus lacks clarity. The article also addresses challenges of interdisciplinary teamwork and how it can be promoted. Believing that interdisciplinarity, which is widely celebrated at universities and schools of architecture, must be incorporated into the fundamental thinking of curricula design as well as the research agendas of contemporary academia, Hollmén asks: ‘How can the disciplines be bridged in such a way that new insights and understanding are generated, rather than merely mandatory, superficially fulfilling curricula requirements?’ She emphasizes that many educational institutions suffer from a lack of agility and the ability to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances in society. In her article she draws on her research expertise in interdisciplinary university pedagogy and her experience with interdisciplinarity as head of the Aalto WiT (World in Transition) LAB, an interdisciplinary, cross-school research and education unit that hosts collaborative initiatives across Aalto University in Finland.

SECTION II

The author of the article ‘Walking the Line: Exploring A Perambulatory Research Practice’ is architect Matthew Ashton, a PhD student at KTH/Architecture in Stockholm. He begins his article by telling a story: In 1905, a Swedish scholar with an interest in geology set out for a walk of 200 kilometres with students from the universities of Stockholm and Uppsala. The expedition team made detailed observations of the Swedish landscape ‘to understand the chronology of events that transformed the landscape towards

the end of the last ice age'. In 2023, Aston went on a similar walk in his exploration of the terrain. He finds walking to be a creative, generative, and explorative practice for the mode of entering, experiencing, and investigating the 'presence of the real'. It is a research practice for bringing experience, perception, and intuition into play, through using the body to record, read, and transcribe the surroundings.

According to Ashton, the objective of his article is to 'unpack the act of walking as a creative mode of research'. More specifically, he wants to reflect on how walking can help to increase one's sense of awareness of the phenomenological lifeworld, including social, spatial, and temporal relationships at play in the landscape. He argues for a view from the level of the body, defining the line of walking as a frame of investigation, delimiting the area of exploration to a distinct geographic area. It also functions as a research method, where walking—tracing the line—becomes a primary mode of exploration. The article presents clear and strong arguments about the benefits of using the body and the practice of walking as a research method. The approach highlights the senses and attention to the landscape as central elements in knowledge production. Whilst Ashton does not use the concept of transdisciplinarity in his article, the text includes a series of reflections on how architectural knowledge can be generated with the body as a sensitive tool. Seen from this perspective, walking the line appears to be a fundamentally humanistic method with a transdisciplinary character. Ashton's approach crosses disciplinary boundaries in order to create a more holistic view of the landscape.

The article 'Unravelling Multi-Actor Agencies in a Fragile Landscape' was written by landscape architect Violaine Forsberg Mussault, presently a PhD student at AHO in Oslo. In her article she discusses transdisciplinary methodologies for so-called 'thick' site reading, while explaining how she has used transdisciplinary methodologies to uncover the complex dynamics of the hazardous environment in the Undredal valley in Norway. The twenty-kilometre-long valley is located along the Aurlandsfjord, surrounded by mountain landscapes. According to the author, rockfalls are prevalent in spring, and floods erode sections of the valley floor during torrential overflows. To explore alterations of living conditions in this milieu, Forsberg Mussault took part in an interdisciplinary research collaboration with experts representing many different disciplinary fields, including geologists, geotechnical engineers, hydrologists, architects, and cultural heritage experts. As pointed

out by the author, the group of experts also collaborated with local laypeople when analysing the valley, thus including community perspectives in its work in order to obtain a more thorough understanding of the landscape.

Authorities and planners have 'risk assessment maps' to guide land use and planning. Whilst they aim to protect settlements, according to Forsberg Mussault, they omit fragile areas in nature, vulnerabilities for animals, and threats to cultural landscapes. Although the maps provide rich data on natural phenomena, they tend to show them as isolated phenomena instead of inter-related processes. When analysing landscapes, Forsberg Mussault thus advocates for nuanced and inclusive research approaches that integrate geological, hydrological, and ecological sciences with situated knowledge, alongside studies of the landscape's human and more-than-human relational dimensions. Her article presents four such approaches to critically engaging with complex sites: 1) '*deciphering forces*', 2) '*unravelling interwoven relationships*', 3) '*understanding community attachments*', and 4) '*exploring more-than-human socialities*'.

Architect Vignir Freyr Helgason, also a PhD student at AHO in Oslo, is the author of the article 'Rethinking the Place Qualities and Cultural Heritage of In-Between Cities'. His article presents a case study focussing on Lørenskog, a rapidly growing Norwegian municipality on the outskirts of Oslo. According to Helgason, Lørenskog is neither a rural or farming landscape nor a city. Instead, the municipality has to be understood as something 'in-between'. Helgason uses the concept of the 'Zwischenstadt' introduced by German architect and urban planner Thomas Sievert to understand the development of Lørenskog and its character as a municipality. According to the author, urbanization in Norway has followed the 'compact city' model. The outcomes of transformations such as the densification in Lørenskog have, however, raised concerns and engendered resistance among residents. This critique provides a background to the exploration of so-called place quality issues in planning, especially their relationship to cultural heritage. It is also the backdrop of Helgason's article, in which he sets out to examine preservation and development dynamics through a planning and heritage perspective, with the aim to expand the concept of place quality.

In his article, Helgason references how place qualities are described in the Davos Declaration 2018. The declaration sheds light on an international political and cross-disciplinary professional debate regarding the loss of qualities in landscapes as well as in the built environment. Even if the inten-

tions in the declaration are clear—advocating for an approach in which heritage perspectives are integrated into planning and development—it does not provide solutions for planning. Further research and development are thus needed to ensure the quality of peripheral places, and Helgason consequently defines Lørenskog as a ‘paradigmatic case’ because it is currently one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Norway. The article therefore discusses how place qualities are understood in this context. Helgason argues for exploring new ways of mapping and managing heritage in planning and development for material and immaterial culture to unfold both spatially and socially. According to the author, this calls for a transdisciplinary approach.

Architect Béatrice Stolz, a PhD student at NTNU in Trondheim, analyses transformations in the built environment by focussing on different understandings of architectural qualities in neighbourhoods. With an interest in green transition and spatial culture, her article ‘Architectural Qualities of Circular Neighbourhoods: A Review of Sustainability Rating Systems’ aims to challenge common understandings of circularity in cities. In general, as she argues, circular developments in cities are made ‘to create ecologically regenerative and resilient environments for a transition towards a more sustainable future’. Circular economy strategies and initiatives are furthermore developed to minimize waste and maximize resource efficiency in urban areas. Stolz points out that solutions to address circularity in cities are mostly ‘techno-centred’, but that she believes ‘context- and value-based’ practices could unlock circular potentials already present in a place, and that ‘a holistic understanding of architectural qualities in neighbourhoods’ could be beneficial when implementing circularity principles in such areas. According to the author, a holistic understanding of qualities in neighbourhoods and supporting social considerations necessitate transdisciplinary processes between different actors.

In her article Stolz examines how circularity is understood today, using an analysis of different sustainability rating systems used in Norway to facilitate her discussion. This leads her to the central research question of her article: ‘How can a holistic consideration of architectural qualities in neighbourhoods support circularity?’

In the article ‘How to Map the Architecture of a Changing Society? An Approach to Examining Schoolyards in Stockholm’, architect Matilde Kautsky, a PhD student at KTH/Architecture in Stockholm, investigates how

schools and schoolyards are spaces for education, discipline, and play. Her aim is to understand how changes in society are materialized in the architecture and spaces of everyday life by using schools and schoolyards as examples of such spaces. The main objective of Kautsky's article, however, is to discuss 'how to map the architecture of a changing society', which leads her to reflect on different methods and approaches to mapping. In her article she more specifically addresses three different methods used in combination. As she herself points out, the focus of her article 'is on presenting and discussing the methods, while the results of the research project are presented elsewhere'. In her discussion of methods, Kautsky includes reflections on transdisciplinarity, thus contextualizing her article within the thematic framework of the present book, although, according to the author, 'the article (as such) does not position itself as being transdisciplinary'.

Educational planner Siv Marit Stavem, who is enrolled as a PhD student at the University of Oslo, Faculty of Educational Sciences, is also researching the architecture of schools. In her article, 'The Emergence of Learning Spaces Through Teaching Practices', she brings educational and architectural research together in a transdisciplinary study in which she reflects on how learning spaces can come into being through teaching practices. Drawing on actor-network theory, and taking a socio-material perspective on three specific classrooms in three different Norwegian cities, she aims to discuss how the learning spaces come into being through the practice and routines involved in teaching. Stavem believes that learning spaces such as the ones she reports on 'are as much a product of social construction as of technical innovations and devices in the built environment'. Furthermore, she posits that architectural structures do not determine specific actions, but are planned for particular content. As such, Stavem underscores that her article focusses on illuminating how learning spaces emerge through the teaching process and interrelations between different actors via translations and negotiations.

With the compilation of texts in this book, NAF/NAAR wishes to foreground reflections on PhD education and its contents. The book follows on from two previous NAF/NAAR publications on PhD research in the Nordic countries, and is thus part of a small thematic series on this topic published by the association's publishing house.¹¹ Each book in the series addresses a particular aspect of current PhD research. Although the present publication by no means paints a complete picture of the many discussions that took

place during the NAF/NAAR symposium at the Royal Danish Academy, at which fifteen PhD students spoke, it is representative of discursive tendencies that were presented and voiced in this context. And just as the book makes no claim to being complete in its coverage or account of the role of transdisciplinarity or transdisciplinary studies at the schools of architecture in the Nordic countries, it nevertheless reflects observations and hypotheses that are presented in other larger and more significant publications on the subject matter.

The 2010 volume *Transdisciplinary Knowledge Production in Architecture and Urbanism: Towards Hybrid Modes of Inquiry*, edited by Isabelle Doucet and Nel Janssens, is worth mentioning as an example.¹² The book addresses the hybridization of knowledge production in space-related research and describes architecture (and urbanism)—operating as both a discipline and a profession—as a particularly receptive ground for transdisciplinary research.¹³ By endorsing knowledge production that is situated in the architectural and urban planning profession or practice, as well as practice-based approaches in theory, it highlights the importance of new hybrid modes of inquiry that architectural scholars can draw upon when conducting research that engages with broader societal concerns or is embedded in complex, networked, and distributed endeavours. In the present book we also experience a focus on methods, on context-specific negotiations of knowledge, on ‘architectural pragmatism’, and on ‘views from within’. It provides a context for an understanding of transdisciplinarity and PhD research in architecture in the Nordic countries through exemplifying what the students who engage in transdisciplinarity research, how they work, and how they theorize their studies. It is the hope of NAF/NAAR that this book will foster further discussion on these subjects and their relevance.

NOTES

¹ Jørgen Dehs, Martin Weihe Esbensen, and Claus Peder Pedersen (eds.), *When Architects and Designers Write/Draw/Build/? a PhD* (Aarhus, Arkitekt skolens Forlag, 2013); Anne Elisabeth Toft and Magnus Rönn (eds.), *The Production of Knowledge in Architecture by PhD Research in the Nordic Countries* (Nordic Academic Press of Architectural Research, 2018).

² Although the first formalized doctoral programmes in architecture in the Nordic countries were set up in the early 1990s, several theses on architectural research had already been written in the 1970s and 1980s. In Sweden, early experiments with PhD education—including special courses and an individual study plan for each PhD student—started in the 1970s at the schools of architecture in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Lund. See Jerke Lundequist, 'Research in Architecture and the Idea of a Social Science', in T. j. M. van der Voordt and H. B. R. van Wegen (eds.), *Doctorates in Design and Architecture*, Vol. 1, pp. 77–85 (Delft: Delft University of Technology, 1996).

³ Anne Elisabeth Toft and Magnus Rönn, 'Introduction', in idem (eds.), *The Production of Knowledge in Architecture by PhD Research in the Nordic Countries* (Nordic Academic Press of Architectural Research, 2018), p. 11.

⁴ Anne Solberg, *Developing Doctorateness in Art, Design and Architecture*, PhD dissertation, Faculty of Humanities, Sports and Educational Sciences, University College of Southeast Norway Kongsberg, 2017, p. 30; *Doctoral Dissertations at the University College of Southeast Norway* 15, link: file:///C:/Users/aet/Downloads/Thesis-1.pdf.

⁵ See the Call for Papers: <https://kglakademi.dk/naarnaf-symposium-2023-nordic-phd-research-architecture>.

⁶ <https://royaldanishacademy.com/en/research-secretariat/kursusprogram-2024>.

⁷ <https://royaldanishacademy.com/en/research-and-artistic-research-kadk>.

⁸ See the Call for Papers: <https://kglakademi.dk/naarnaf-symposium-2023-nordic-phd-research-architecture>.

⁹ See the Call for Papers: <https://kglakademi.dk/naarnaf-symposium-2023-nordic-phd-research-architecture>.

¹⁰ See the Call for Papers: <https://kglakademi.dk/naarnaf-symposium-2023-nordic-phd-research-architecture>.

¹¹ *The Nordic Academic Press of Architectural Research* was founded on 6 December 2016. It is the publishing house of the Nordic Association of Architectural Research (NAF/NAAR). The publishing house's *Golden Open Access NAAR Proceedings Series* is ranked at level 1 in Norway, Denmark, and Finland: <https://arkitekturforskning.net/na/issue/publishing>.

¹² Isabelle Doucet and Nel Janssens (eds.), *Transdisciplinary Knowledge Production in Architecture and Urbanism: Urban and Landscape Perspectives*, Vol. 11 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010).

¹³ Doucet and Janssens, *Transdisciplinary Knowledge Production in Architecture and Urbanism: Urban and Landscape Perspectives*, back cover.