EAAE Charter on Architectural Research

(update March 2022)

The EAAE Charter on Architectural Research is intended as a reference document for the use of universities, architecture schools and research institutions, but also funding agencies, governmental bodies, professional bodies and architectural practices that are undertaking, evaluating and financing architectural research. It specifies the character and objectives of architectural research, confirms the variety of valid methodologies and supports the development of a vibrant, internationally recognized and well-funded research community.

Architecture as a Discipline and a Field of Knowledge

Architecture is the discipline devoted to the creation, transformation and interpretation of the built environment and the articulation of space at various scales. It involves art, science, design, conservation, planning, management, construction and representation. The discipline of architecture engages with the cultural, ethical, aesthetic, socio-economic, and environmental conditions affecting our quality of life.

Architecture is facing challenges of climate crisis, globalization, urbanization and social transformation that necessitate vital research. In parallel, the horizons of architectural experimentation are expanding rapidly with the development of new technologies and media. If we are to understand, explain, anticipate and influence the consequences of these changes, research is essential. Moreover, research is essential for the continued expansion of the discipline's knowledge base, the development of spatial understandings, and the improvement in teaching, learning and practice of architecture.

Architectural Research

Architectural research is an original investigation undertaken in order to generate knowledge, insights and understanding based on competencies, methods and tools proper to the discipline of architecture. It has its own particular knowledge base, mode, scope, tactics and strategies.

In architectural research, design is the fundamental way of thinking and process of knowledge production. It generates critical inquiry and advanced synthesis through design work.

The process of designing, which constitutes the essence of architecture, is from its very nature creative in the original sense of "bringing forward" tangible and intangible matters. In this process, factual and methodological knowledge, both experienced/tested and experimental/intuitive, are applied to specific questions and aspects, problems concerning human activities and the physical and virtual realm where they take place, aiming at reaching innovative – i.e., novel – solutions mostly in the form of physical and virtual entities.

This process may often seem "chaotic" in the sense of "unstructured" or even "random" – and sometimes is. However, this is a self-reflective, iterative process where the findings of these seemingly "random" actions are again and again critically questioned and contextualized. Furthermore, there is a strong element of structured knowledge production through research and development in a design process. In this sense, the strength of designing as a scientific and artistic research method lies in applying experimentation and variation to solving concrete problems and choosing the preferred solution founded case-based on criteria both rational and communicable.

Moreover, research in architecture encompasses knowledge production through design projects, artefacts and design processes, as well as research about and for design. Therefore research results may be obtained by, and consistent with experience in practice.

Connection to Other Disciplines

Although architecture has its own corpus of specific knowledge, it needs to engage with other disciplines to create new knowledge and synthesis. In that interaction, architects contribute their ability to act in complex- non-reductive particular environments. By embracing aspects of rationality and intuition, objectivity and inter-subjectivity, technique and emotion, logic and creativity, architectural research enriches the understanding of the world. Architectural research is therefore fertile for trans- and inter-disciplinary endeavors.

Contexts

Architectural research takes place in a broad societal and cultural context, connecting academy, practice, and continuing education. A clarification of this position is necessary, stimulating stronger links between (and intertwinement of) theoretical and practice-based research and between academic and professional arenas.

By its nature, architecture also connects to a variety of industries, including the cultural sector, the construction sector, the environmental sector, the public, private and social sectors. Moreover, architecture has its own industry which is professional practice. Much of the most innovative and relevant architectural research inevitably emerges from and contributes to this industry of professional practice.

Architectural Research and Education

In academia and practice, architectural research supports education both directly, through research training of future architects, and indirectly, by providing for the continual advancement of the discipline.

Students in architecture are taught at the highest level of academic education. The aim of architectural higher education is to develop a research disposition in students. As future architects, they need to be able to establish basic premises, perform critical analysis, conduct intensive research and propose syntheses independently.

The architectural school as a whole and the design studio, in particular, are places for research par excellence.

Output

Peer review, communication and international dissemination are crucial and should relate to the nature of the research.

Valid architectural research outputs are as varied as the constantly growing range of research approaches. It includes installations, experimental projects, design proposals, models and actual buildings as such, in addition to written and graphic research outputs.

Criteria and Characteristics for Quality

Architectural research meets the general criteria of originality, significance, and rigour. It produces forms of output and discourse proper to disciplinary practice, to make it discussable,

communicable and useful to relevant audiences. It is validated through panels of experts who collectively cover the range of disciplinary competencies addressed by the work.

These criteria could guide architectural research to a high level of quality and open up new horizons:

- the research is meaningful and relevant for design practices, for the discipline, -for society, for culture; it explores limits and expands them;
- it contributes to design practices, it originality emerges from the exploration of spatial understanding and/or the creative design process;
- the research endeavors to make its processes and foundations as consistent, clear and explicit as possible;
- method, context, process and results are communicated and submitted to regular peer review and the research insights shared effectively; thesis and results are contextualized with the relevant discourses, work and literature to explicate the original and relevant contribution of the research;
- it creates and exploits trans-disciplinary connections.

Evidencing Research Impact

Architectural research impacts multifarious audiences: individuals, groups and institutions. It affects local, regional, national and/or global scales, in different research areas and timeframes, which requires strategic timing of impact-making and assessment. The nature of impact, as well as the ways of measuring it, depends on the audiences, areas and contexts in which it is accessible, effective and engaging. The EAAE advocates expanding the scope of impact assessment indicators and including referential bodies of evidence such as: curation, community engagement, public presentations, practice recognition by peers, scholars and stakeholders (awards), funding and publications.

Ethics

Ethicality requires the researcher to adopt a posture that manifests integrity, tolerance, acceptance of difference, and honesty regarding the participants in and the subject of research. Respect for existing ethical codes and for the freedom of researchers is fundamental. Architectural research must take into account its direct impact on culture, society and the world's ecosystem.

Funding

Funding policies need to be structured in accordance with the variety of modes, scope and contexts of architectural research.

To guarantee ethical integrity architectural research must have adequate financing: a variable combination of public and private financing, depending on the research aims.

For these reasons besides existing short-term financing, a solid basis is needed for assuring continuity of the research and its long-term quality.

Research and Practice Linked

The EAAE advocates stronger links between theoretical and practice-based research, and therefore between academia and the profession for the establishment of an expanded arena of architectural research.