NETZWERK ARCHITEKTUR WISSENSCHAFT

Call for Papers

The Power of Sources in Architecture Research and Practice

8. FORUM ARCHITEKTURWISSENSCHAFT

Date and location: March 9–11, 2022, Berlin
Deadline: October 15, 2021

Access to sources, knowledge, and information is going through fundamental changes as globalisation and digitalisation evolve. The same changes apply to the process of gaining new academic insights. As the amount of sources increases (as well as their diversity and general distribution), there are still fundamental differences in accessibility, depending on one's geographic and economic position. What role do economic and social factors play in a researcher's possibility to visit an archive, or simply to make due with a curated and digitalised selection of sources? In this call for papers, matters of usage, reception, archivisation, and hierarchical structure of sources are questioned. This also applies to architecture as a globalised and digitalised academic discipline and practice – an issue that architecture must address. The 8th Forum of Architectural Science will examine the power of sources in four thematic aspects: Agency and Politics, Canon and Episteme, Materiality and Mediality, and Reception and Production.

(1) Agency & Politics

Sources are subject to the prerogative of interpretation. They can unearth as well as conceal power relations, and transfer bias. One could use the source easily for one argument, whereas for another it could show resistance or even contradiction. The agency of the source is dependent on the institutions of archivisation and indexation: Who gathers the material? Which part of it is made accessible and when? Which criteria are in place when parts of archives are disposed, organised, and catalogued? What would subsequently be digitised, in which quality, and through which medium made accessible? In the process of archivisation, finances, special interests, and technical abilities always play a significant role. Collectors, research institutions, and the distributors of funding decide which kinds of source accessibility is created; that is, which source would actually be read and academically addressed, and which would not. This vast array of factors, social actors and interests, which dictate whether or not a source would be made accessible, makes the question of agency and politics behind the source an acute one. What do sources tempt us to do? What resistances do they unleash? To what extent does our understanding of a source change as the number of interpretations significantly increases, and as we uproot the source from the context of its creation and allow it to circulate globally?

(2) Canon & Episteme

Since the emergence of the disciplines of architecture and art history, sources have been linked to the question of canon formation, because knowledge hierarchies and evaluation paradigms are established for a certain period of time, e. g. the Eurocentric perspective. However, canonical knowledge, such as stylistic formulas and

motifs, change or are repeatedly criticised. As we can observe today with the questioning of simplistic polar models of knowledge such as north-south, east-west, centre-periphery, or gender-binarity, the polaric interpretation of knowledge is being received with increasing criticism. But even an supposedly unbiased approach could be critically questioned if it amounts to the establishment of a "world canon"—for can there be such a thing at all and would it be desirable? At best, a global history of architecture looks at the origins and mobility of sources, forms, practices, materials, labour, etc., but with regard to architectural studies, the question arises, to what extent can the integration of different subject cultures lead to open/diverse or to specific/focused canons? For example, do we still need supposedly universal anthologies of architectural theory, or does the sum of specific readers on feminist, postcolonial, Marxist, etc. architectural theories reflect the plurality of the discipline?

(3) Materiality & Mediality

As a multidisciplinary science, architecture produces and refers to a large variety of sources: buildings, sketches, models, texts, photos, material samples, standardised construction parts, critiques, movies, and even everyday communication. How to approach such a diverse spectrum of sources is an ambivalent matter both in practice and in academia. While some scholars tend to focus on one kind of source (for example early modern treatises), some studies require a broader variety of sources, most notably in the field of sociology of architecture. It is, by now, common practice to treat oral history and subjective accounts of individuals as acceptable contributions to scientific discourse. Should we not apply the same standards to digital material such as emails, tweets, or posts? Within a few decades large parts of material and medial landscape have been changed by the advances of computer science—digitised, and taken the form of multimedia archives. What changes does this hold for the work of architecture scholars, as well as for archivists and curators? Other instances such as privacy laws and copyrights also limit the accessibility of sources. Furthermore, the constant changes in technical standards make archivisation, access, and legibility of digital sources difficult. Other relevant questions are ones of objectivity, authenticity, and trustworthiness (for example, how can one prevent the forging of documents and propagandistic distribution of sources?). How does this change from the material to the medial affect the way different sources convey knowledge?

(4) Reception & Production

Not only scholarly work is influenced by referencing sources. Creative working processes are equally affected, i. e. architecture, as we know it, is unimaginable without frequent referencing and the usage of sources. In the history of architecture, many architects have used academic references to various degrees to support their design claims. The question of sources is therefore very relevant for the practice of architecture and how architects form their initial concepts and raw drafts. These drafts often take the shape of a story, whereby facts and invention blend together. We therefore ask the question, how do references lay the foundation for architectural innovation, and which collection of sources do they stem from? In the practice of architecture, sources are not only researched, utilised and interpreted, they are also produced and are given new forms. Practices such as Critical Mapping and architectural forensic processing of records show how data can be transformed into sources, and how these sources can imply a connection between various insights, and value attributions. These new forms of sources could, in turn, act as the starting point of new architectural drafts, or

even be brought as evidence in court. How does practical architecture receive and adopt sources? And how do practices of architecture and built architecture become, in turn, sources themselves?

We are looking forward to receive abstracts in German or English (max. 2.500 characters incl. spacing) for lectures (20 min), which comment on the topics outlined above. Please also send a short CV (max. 500 characters) not later than October 15, 2021 to: forum8@architekturwissenschaft.net

The notification of the acceptance of the contributions will take place beginning of November 2021. We kindly ask you to send us a draft paper by March 1, 2022, which can be shared among the fellow presenters in advance. A publication is planned.

The Forum Architekturwissenschaft is an initiative of the Netzwerk Architekturwissenschaft e.V. (www.architekturwissenschaft.net). As a platform for scientific exchange and networking, it regularly addresses relevant topics in architectural science. In doing so, it wants to promote the reflection on architecture beyond disciplinary boundaries and bring different research practices and methods into dialogue.

Note

The forum is planned as a live event; subject to pandemic developments, an online format is envisaged. Depending on this development, we will seek support for any travel costs that may be incurred.

Organizer

Netzwerk Architekturwissenschaft e.V. in cooperation with Technische Universität Berlin and Berliner Hochschule für Technik.

Concept & Organization

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