

January 27-29, 2023

Ankara, Türkiye

**5. INTERNATIONAL ANKARA  
MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES  
CONGRESS**

**FULL TEXTS BOOK**



Edited by  
**Prof. Dr. Memet ŞAHİN**

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**ETHNOGRAPHY APPLIED TO THE ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN STUDIO**

*Prof. Dr. Mónica ALCINDOR*

*Universidade Portucalense Infante D. Henrique, Architecture and Multimedia Gallaecia  
Departament, Porto, Portugal.*

*ORCID NO: 0000-0002-4939-0295*

**ABSTRACT**

Architects have a clear influence on their relationships through the buildings they make, but they usually have tacit knowledge of these anthropological issues when they provide architectural solutions being able to marginalize both the meanings of the place and an in-depth analysis of the social nature of the existing spaces which are inseparable from the technical, constructive and typological characteristics in a general architectural way.

It is defined an ethnographic methodology based on the assumption that the knowledge of reality is always polyhedral and is enriched by the confluence of different perspectives, strengthening joint action as a community.

The goal of the development of this methodology is to provide the architect with a valuable working tool in an attempt to overcome the difficulties involved in giving and strengthening local relevance and to capture the factors that are significant for the community to which it is intended to provide a service.

**Keywords:** Ethnographic Methodology, PAR, Social Spacialities.

**INTRODUCTION**

Architects, understood as responsible for the construction of artefacts, as well as different modifications that define our space environment, have a clear influence on our relationships through the constructions they propose but, within the curricula of the schools of Architecture, they tend to address these relational issues, that is to say, more socially, in a dispersed way. Mostly, they tend to have a mainly formal approach, marginalizing equally the meanings of the place and an in-depth analysis of the social nature of the existing spaces that are inseparable from the technical, constructive, typological or, in general, architectural characteristics.

On the other hand, educational systems, in general, have the responsibility of producing the social changes deemed necessary for the future. However, in the case of architectural studies, schools can become intentional agents of cultural discontinuity, a type of discontinuity that neither reinforces traditional values nor recruits young people to become part of the existing system. Rather, they recruit students for a system that does not yet exist or is emerging. And inevitably produce conflicts, since sometimes the knowledge conveyed in the architecture schools isolate their future architects from the cultural system they intend to serve. The expressions “architect houses” are popular, which means that they follow aesthetic slogans far from the cognitive models that a large part of the population possesses, that is to say, from the spaces in which a large part has been socialized.

Architects must take into account not only the direct client, who is the one who orders the work but, all those who, in one way or another, will be affected by the scenery of social life, if only through the facades of the buildings. Also, they must bear in mind that environments materialize values and develop resilience in those cases of special and extreme situations, where the consequences of a catastrophe erode the life of a place, helping to balance the daily activity, allowing more quickly to overcome losses of all kinds. This approach is based on the importance of the relationship of space and people mediating agency between the physical form of their communities and the ever-changing culture (Arkaraprasertkul, 2009).

Through the use of ethnography as a previous step to design anything, it is possible to think further and create project modes that actively integrate all involved actors. This is based on the understanding that knowledge is always polyhedral and enriched by the confluence of different perspectives that strengthen joint action as a community. Even the lighter version of ethnography requires architects to be very keen to ask questions about the rationality behind certain activities that take place in the community, rather than to just think about the characteristics of the architecture and the physical conditions, therefore avoiding becoming discontinuity agents since they are aware of the existing dynamics before acting at any place. It enables considering the different perspectives present in architectural spaces, providing a broader view of reality. The use of ethnography implies a re-evaluation of taken-for-granted practices, norms and management styles.

That is why it is proposed to develop a diagnostic methodology based on ethnography as a method of microcosm research that architects must know before entering the most proactive field. The use of ethnography is relevant because, through the use of this technique, architects will find a tool that will help them capture the various issues that they must attend to, which pivot from the most specific issues related to the direct order of the private clients to those other variables related to the community where the project will be located. It should not be forgotten that individual processes do not cease to be social since they always start from a social reference (Stewart, López & Cuadrado, 2013).

At the same time, with the use of this methodology, knowledge will increase. This methodology can go further and also generates opportunities for the evaluation of the built environment after the occupational phase, allowing architects to learn steadily from each project they have designed. Therefore, architects improve their knowledge about the importance of the built environment, its spaces and physical forms to better understand the behaviour of its inhabitants. Furthermore, developing the awareness that the learning process must deal with issues of a formalistic and symbolic nature will only then ascribe meaning to architecture, although the professional position, from the architect to the ethnographer, is neither straight nor totally effective, maintaining the architect eye behind the ethnographer as a process of integration and adaptation of two different methodological approaches (Costa & Marques da Silva, 2014).

#### **DEFINING CONCEPTS & APPROACHES**

To carry out the fieldwork, it is necessary to define a field guide that allows the architect to establish a filter of what is fundamental to apprehend from the worldview of the specific place in the community regarding the architectural issues.

Space is not neutral, and as such, it should not be designed for a neutral agent; it is imperative to understand how men and women experience it. In this sense, the daily routines of ordinary people reveal both the struggles and compromises that characterise lived experience (Tarrant & Hall, 2020). The daily practice of space creates awareness of hierarchic orderings and social structuring. There are considerations of cross- or multi-scale issues in which concepts such as intersectionality (e.g., interconnections across class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability) and intergenerationality (the relationships between different age groups). Therefore, there is the need for theories and concepts that would help to address the issues inherent in design to facilitate the path of architecture for people.

Some theories provide a starting point for a theoretical discussion and sources of analytical categories for deepening the human variables. These categories allow empirical material to be put into relation with theoretical ideas, so it is essential to produce a field guide, that is, a breakdown of the dimensions of what is intended to be known in-depth. They help to focus attention on the most relevant aspects of our purpose and facilitate the understanding of the social-cultural reality of each cultural environment.

As a field guide, two main analytical categories can be established, whose function is to order the field of study according to the theoretical purpose of the knowledge on the spatial worldview of the local community.

<i>PROXEMIA</i>	<i>Cultural distances</i>	<i>SYMBOLIC UNIVERSE</i>	<i>Identifying traits</i>
	<i>Dynamics and flows</i>		<i>Relational traits</i>
	<i>Beam of positions and directions</i>		<i>Historical features</i>
	<i>Sensory spaces</i>		

**Table 1.** Main concepts

Edward T. Hall (1972) coined the term *proxemia* for the diverse ways of relating spatially between different cultures. It deals with the personal and social space, in which the use that people make of space as a specific cultural product is analysed because individuals are socialized in different sensory spaces. However, to define the concept of *proxemia*, Bachelard (2012), in “The poetics of space”, proves that it is helpful. It facilitates the recognition of the compression of meanings of the spaces as a beam of relative positions and directions from the Eurocentric perspective, bearing in mind that architecture, as well as landscape, are cultural products loaded with ideology.

On the other hand, and in contrast, Augé (2000), while presenting the new spaces that have emerged under conditions of modernity, defines anthropological places as those that have a principle of meaning for those who inhabit them and a principle of intelligibility for those who observe them. These are symbolic universes that contain identifying, relational and historical features.

There are other authors to take into account in term of the main literature on the topics of understanding places and their communities.

C. Alexander (1980) published a classic book that focuses on pattern language, which is paramount to a literature review on this topic. It is based on the starting point that pattern language implies acknowledging the main variables established when a place is adequate and appropriate for its community. The author offers an insight on the awareness that building is much more than building in an isolated way; instead, it is necessary to consider the whole environment for any action to be coherent.

Also, the theories by M. Foucault (1967) on space and place should also be highlighted, although they mainly focused on the *topia* concept and its main characteristics. That is to say, a commonplace, understood as the bundle of relationships naturalized that allow these places to be recognized as normal and normalized places. The traditional architecture of any place takes the role of maximum representation of these models, since they have been scenarios where the spatial socialization of any historical community and, therefore, psychological comfort foundations and cognitive models have emerged.

In a way, this methodology seeks to provide a tool to recognize the pattern language of the traditional architecture of any community where it is implemented through the voices of the community itself and, therefore, far from the author architecture.

**ETHNOGRAPHY FOR ARCHITECTURE FOR PEOPLE**

Ethnography focuses on analyzing the semiotic keys that allow the architect to decipher the diverse experiences obtained from a place and, thus, develop a more conscious analytical perspective, valuing the integral use of the perceptive, the sensorial and the emotional, as fundamental chains of expression and architectural work that must be considered before progressing towards the proposal phase. It is about promoting reflection as a process of knowing any place that allows a better understanding of the worldview of the community living in that place.

However, the practice of ethnography requires a certain attitude towards the community intended to be understood. It is what is known as estrangement, namely, the perception of anomalies as a starter for all forms of scientific research (Velasco & Díaz, 2009). This attitude consists of being surprised and interested in how others interpret or realize their sociocultural world.

Since any person is a socialized individual, this circumstance involves two situations. On the one hand, architects may have never questioned the ethnocentrism of their ideas. On the other hand, they may have naturalized the environment from where the orders will come. These situations hinder intellectual reflection; that is why it is necessary to encourage estrangement in the architects.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the place of intervention, it is advisable to read ethnography studies on other places and cultures distanced in time and space to promote the missed attitude and try to turn the perception of the anomaly into a source of debate that promotes a new look at common and proper environments. This allows greater depth of compression as an effective tool to a solid foundation for the project.

#### **Objectivity**

The typical problem that emerges in the use of qualitative techniques is the researcher's biases. Trying to neutralize these distorting biases is one of the essential goals of modern ethnography.

The objectivity in ethnography is mainly focused on the researcher – in the case under analysis, the architect. From the cognitive and the interactive standpoints, there is not a single cultural reality; instead, there may be different cultural realities. Thus, starting from this principle, one of the objectives pursued will be the reduction in the production of the data on the influence of the principles, values and beliefs in which architects have been endo-cultured as social agents, which is known as cultural relativism.

In seeking this objectivity, the proposed ethnography will work with different sources and techniques to ensure data triangulation, providing internal validity to this method, although it is not possible to achieve external validity, given that qualitative work does not allow it.

In addition to the aforementioned quality mechanism, another resource is available to ensure this objectivity: the work of several researchers in the same place, that is, more than one architect of the firm carry out this study. This way, there are re-studies of the same place, in which the accumulated individual biases can annul one another, thus ensuring a better and closer understanding of what is conceived as objectivity.

#### **Data production techniques**

There are two stages in the development of an ethnographic study of a community for architectural design: the pre-fieldwork and the fieldwork studies.

The **pre-fieldwork** study consists of a short data gathering beginning to look at how others interpret their environment. For this stage, the following elements are central:

- Bibliographic information search:

A bibliographic search allows knowing the history of the place and, thus, gain previous knowledge to more easily understand the interviews' stories. This step covers the referential or informative dimension of the symbolic dimension of any place.

- Documentary information:

Municipal urban planning plans.

These are models for the construction of the built world, i.e., documents on what is considered artificial, the action of man, against what is deemed natural.

The exploration of these documents allows to carry out two types of analysis. On the one hand, they provide the referential or informative dimension that architects must know, as they stipulate the current urban policies for the specific area of any environment. On the other hand, these documents allow their analysis from the social perspective, that is, the analysis of what emerges and does not emerge in them; that is a way of understanding the objectifications of what exists in the architects' imaginary. It is about

capturing what has been overlooked and, therefore, does not exist in the cognitive map of the document editors but that can exist in the cognitive map of the inhabitants of the place.

Newspaper library.

Another source of information is the compilation of articles in newspapers related to matters associated with the place. This is an indicator of the concerns of the community and the values behind them.

Collection of old photographs.

Through these documents, it is possible to capture the evolution that the place has undergone and identify more easily the cultural artefacts that are maintained and may have meanings for the definition of the place, i.e., highly symbolic historical elements that are intelligible to the community of the place and, therefore, affect in some way the interpretation of the place.

The **fieldwork study** aims at assessing the social nature of the place under study. The first-hand information gathered helps to buffer the researcher from other existing interpretations. The fieldwork allows the researcher to work in a multilateral approach and combine different subjects and perspectives for the improvement of the spaces and the search for better solutions, identifying the meanings and identities associated with the built environment.

#### **Observation:**

It is a technique to produce empirical data that aims at collecting both human social action crystallized in spaces and construction techniques, and also human practice understood as social action.

The data from observation are grouped into three different types:

- actions that create cultural artefacts. It is any type of intervention that has been built or produced in this location according to cultural rules, inasmuch that these works of any nature (works, earthworks, roads, retaining walls and/or orchards and gardens) hide a process of social production.

- Registration of social practices. It consists of capturing the individuals' social practices in their spatial frameworks of activity. It is about the movement that occurs from the social to the spatial and from the spatial to the social. The recognition of the importance of space frames is essential for the proposed intervention to combine with existing and future dynamics, both in everyday life and in more sporadic events.

It is complementary to the interview technique based on the observation of the practices of the different actors that are part of the project. However, some things are better captured in words to convey information, whereas others are better captured through photography, and others, such as experiences, are better captured through drawing (Causey, 2017). Drawing helps architects to see more deeply. Observation can embrace all forms of line-making, from handwriting to sketch-drawing, to understand the material world not as being composed of completed objects but rather as part of an unfolding cultural process interwoven with articulating behaviours and actions (Ingold cited in Causey, 2017).

#### **- Interviews with individuals:**

Interviews are deemed a transcendental part of the methodology. It is essential to take into account the voices that come from the recent past and that have been counted and naturalized by the descendants as a source of invaluable data. Undoubtedly, what is remarkable about this technique is the way individuals analyze the evolutions of these environments developed for this time and in the past, namely, the variables that range from the various living and organizational conditions to the conflicts in the community. The interviews seek to investigate the subjective interests of these individuals, that is, their position. Any verbal material produced has two plans of interpretation. However, we are interested only in the dimension of perspectives, which is not falsifiable, in contrast to other perspectives. In this way, it is possible to study the meanings behind the social life scenarios produced by the individuals-in-relationship (Díaz de Rada, 2008). In other words, it is about extracting intersubjectivity about spatial matters. Those contents were worked in an intergenerational way and are the shapers of the cognitive models shared collectively.

These stories are intended to provide answers to two key aspects in the knowledge of the microcosm of the place:

- Description of the spaces to cover all sensorial spaces, that is, visual, olfactory, acoustic, tactile and thermal senses.
- Meanings of the place according to historical, relational and identifying variables.

Also, it is very helpful to rely on graphic documents produced by interviews and not exclusively on the verbal discourse as an element of study, i.e., the elaboration of an elementary sketch without great demands that depicts in a simple way its program and aspirations, that graphically reflects its worldview. As mentioned previously, drawing is another way of expressing the world, and while challenging for some, it also assists in overcoming the inherent language proficiency biases of interviews (Brennan-Horley, Luckman, Gibson & Willoughby-Smith, 2010).

#### **- Discussion in focus groups:**

Focus group discussion is a technique where a researcher assembles a group of individuals to discuss a specific topic, aiming to draw from the complex personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of the participants through a moderated interaction. It is perceived to be a “cost-effective” and “promising alternative”, offering a platform for differing paradigms or worldviews. In a focus group discussion, researchers adopt the role of “facilitators” or “moderators”. Unlike interviews, the researcher (the architect) thereby takes a peripheral, rather than a centre-stage role in a focus group discussion (O. Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick & Mukherjee, 2018).

#### **- Behavioural analysis:**

It consists of the selection of key informants to draw community mapping and everyday itineraries, resorting to mobile devices for spatial tracking and posterior GIS [Geographic Information System] analysis. The tracking of itineraries allows the measurement of distances and travel times. Furthermore, it is a process of active engagement, using walking methodology as a collaborative and political strategy, and is pivotal to mediate a reconfiguration of emotion and fear within one locality, as well as to identify different qualities of space throughout the week. GIS behavioural analysis can visually represent the diversity and complexity of the daily life experiences through the integration of different cartographic layers, such as residence and job location, mobility in the city, leisure and shopping areas, among others (Boschmann & Cubbon, 2014). For this reason, the use of sketch maps is proposed to develop cartographies of group and individual spatial narratives.

Mapping technologies can be used to broaden the scope of data available via interview practices and, on the other hand, they produce new ways of effectively communicating research results back to the architects involved in the design. In fact, the capabilities of GIS databases could be extended further into hyperlinking geographical locations back to qualitative interview responses in written or audio form or to other visual data sources, such as digital photographs (Brennan-Horley, Luckman, Gibson & Willoughby-Smith, 2010).

In brief, the interrelation of different analyses ensures the quality of the data collected, which will generate an accurate diagnosis relevant for the subsequent design process. It is intended to work with individuals from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, embodying the intersection between cultural and urban change. It is about a productive synergy among different techniques for offering a window into the complex physical and social environment.

#### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Architecture provides conditions for being human and responds to the human condition. There is a need to rethink the philosophy underlying the material manifestations that, roughly, are induced in projects from the community, inasmuch that the architects in charge of shaping their homes are agents detached from their worldview. Therefore, they are viewed with suspicion (Pallasmaa, 2012).

It is paramount to explore the architectural conditions that support and are part of socio-cultural structures. Architecture has been, since ancient times, a tool in the hands of power to objectify through the buildings the capacity for action on others, and its teaching, in some way, has participated in this

dynamic by limiting and restricting knowledge to one type of architecture over another. This has resulted in the implementation of homogenizing processes that, in late-modernity, have encouraged the unification of any construction within any territory, bringing along the progressive modification of traditional landscapes based on the specific collective cognitive models.

In an attempt to overcome the difficulties involved in giving voice to the people, this methodology is based on the introduction of estrangement to be able to detach and, thus, take a broader perspective that allows capturing the factors that are significant for the community to which it is intended render a service. Ethnography is presented as a suitable tool for these challenges. This method supports designers in their search for patterns and hidden rules, for generating a sense of future orientation and making strategic judgements about the relevance and meaning of design (Suri, 2011).

The difference between “space” and “place” are key concerns for some architects, who notice that it is an asset to use humanities and social sciences methodologies in their works. They reinterpret the ethnographic field as a field that is not only subject to inquiry but that is an object of inquiry seeking a service.

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