

# Role and Relevance of Research in Architectural Practice

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The essence of architecture as a profession lies in its practice. Everything that makes a difference to its philosophy and approach is application-based. At the same time architectural practice is extremely contextual in its nature. In any design project, the goals and aspirations of architects need to be extremely specific. Solid research always helps to strengthen the design contextually.



Practitioners in architecture often claim that research does not affect their field of work. This perception can be a result of the delusion the term “research” creates and requires sufficient elucidation. Research is often considered to be a theoretical approach towards finding answers, probably because of its systematic nature. However, it is a simple concept that involves developing knowledge or expertise in a particular direction, using a well-defined methodology. A design strongly supported by research, works in particular directions of expertise and gives strong competitive advantage. It also helps architects to amplify their capabilities as more equipped professionals.

Theoretically, research can be either pure or applied. Research in architecture is functional in its nature, thus, applied. It helps practitioners to understand client needs better, evaluate project contexts, and assess building performances (in terms of their materials and other components).

Applied architectural research does not simply involve discovering and documenting material and technologies.

As designers of the built environment, architects have the responsibility of creating comfortable living conditions for the users of their design and enhance their experience within. To accomplish these objectives, research becomes an integral part of the design process so that they thoroughly understand their users and design for their comfort, quality of life and satisfaction. At every individual project level, such studies help in understanding the requirements better.

Broadly, research in architectural practice can be technical, functional or anthropological. Technical research enables the designers to update themselves with building materials and technologies that fit in the context most appropriately. Functional research involves evaluations that help in coming up with the best-possible design solutions in terms of layouts, facades, and choice of design elements. Anthropological research mainly deals with occupant requirements and Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE), both of which contribute towards respecting the users’ socio-cultural preferences as well as comfort.

In Indian context, architectural research in practice is involuntarily a part of the project. But it fails to highlight itself as a separate significant entity. Architects conduct case studies to understand their project and client needs better. They do material survey and analysis to decide what suits best for the project context. They also keep in mind the preferences and choices of the clients while designing every element, as they are going to contribute to post occupancy analysis. Only if this systematic approach becomes more defined so that these researches can be used as references for future enquiry, practitioners across the country would accept research as an integral part of their design process.



Three scales of influence that architectural research can contribute to (Source: AIA)

There are certain challenges that need to be dealt with before making such study and documentation open for referencing. For the same, the Council of Architecture needs to devise guidelines that make architects more confident to conduct research and share their evaluation with others as well. The first challenge is to ensure authentication of data to ease the process of archiving and make copyrighting rules more stringent. Secondly, client awareness is an essential component of the process so that they understand and appreciate the benefits of research in their project. Thirdly, there needs to be a well-defined framework and methodology for conducting post occupancy evaluations that do not violate any occupant rights and sentiments. The final challenge is to authenticate the claims of vendors and dealers with respect to material and product specifications, so that the designers know their elements thoroughly before application.

Research gives a purpose and direction to an architectural project. The scope of any practice-oriented research is guided by the client's needs and preferences. Defining this boundary is essential as it controls the ambition of the architect and his project. However, it is known that research involves trial and error. Hence, one should be prepared to get varying results and yet proceed with the study unbiased. Any project design gains tremendous strength when it is backed up by a significant amount of research, hence, the practice should be encouraged and inculcated at every scale and under varied contexts. Conclusively, it can be said that research is an intrinsic component of every architectural design.

#### References:

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