

Approaches: Theory and Research Methodology in Architecture

Doctoral course in architecture, 7,5 credits (corresponds to approximately 200 hours of course work) by ResArc: KTH, UMA, and TUD, spring term 2025 starting December 2024

Course instructors

Janina Gosseye (TUD), Ebba Högström (UMA), Meike Schalk (KTH), and Roemer van Toorn (UMA)

Deadline for application: 1 November 2024

Contact: Meike Schalk, meike.schalk@arch.kth.se

Overview

The doctoral course *Approaches* aims to address basic questions concerning theories and methodologies in architectural research as well as to develop the doctoral students' understanding of the relationship between epistemology, ontology, and methodology. It focuses on activities of:

- knowledge building on doing research
- developing one's own knowledge and skills through writing

This framework includes both practice-oriented research and well-established theoretical and methodological traditions, as well as a debate on canonical or transformative research. The participants will on the one hand develop an understanding for how different fields formulate research questions, and on the other hand develop an increased understanding of their own field in an academic context. In addition, the course addresses the interplay between aim, research questions, theoretical frameworks, methods, investigations/ interventions, and outcomes.

Participants will be asked to position their own architectural research project in a scientific and theoretical framework, and to get a grip of how other fields operate, reason and perform research work. One focus will be on interdisciplinary approaches and approaches beyond disciplines.

Course activities include lectures, literature-, and writing training seminars, workshops, presentations of own research, group work, peer to peer learning and feedback from the instructors. During the course, participants will develop a paper on their research design, theory and methodology, to be presented at the concluding module 4.

The course is a collaboration between the Architecture Schools of The Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm, Umeå University (UMA), and Delft University of Technology (TUD).

Structure

The course is held in four intense modules of two days each and requires 1-2 days of preparatory reading. At least two of them will be delivered in both physical and hybrid form, two modules will be given on Zoom.

- Module 1 is held at UMA, December 4-6, 2024
- Module 2 on Zoom, January 28-29, 2025
- Module 3 on Zoom, March 10-11, 2025
- Optional: writing training seminars in small groups on Zoom, April 8-9, 2025
- Module 4 at TUD, June 4-5, 2025

Each module approaches a broader debate through specific examples. It will offer several tasks and physical and online supervision meetings with instructors and guest lecturers. More information on the detailed program, lectures, readings and assignments will be provided prior to each module.

Module 1 - APPROACHING RESEARCH PRACTICE IN ARCHITECTURE

When: 4-6 December 2024

Where: School of Architecture, Umeå University, Umeå + Zoom

This module is coordinated together with the Swedish Research Council Symposium on Artistic Research 2024 *Hurricanes and Scaffoldings*.

Within the lively debate of artistic research, the symposium will identify critically reflexive frameworks that the arts bring to the wider discourses of society, technology, and politics starting with the concept of hurricanes and scaffolding. The hurricane being a non-human force, and scaffolding being the built infrastructure on which systems can grow.

From the website: <https://www.umarts.se/programme-item/vr-symposium/>

The module will focus on the questions:

How to practice architectural research? What is my research practice? What knowledge does my research create?

This three-day event introduces the course as well as offers a reflection upon the multitude and diversity of current research practices in architecture and adjacent fields. Part of the course activities consist in the participation of the conference. An assignment will be handed out 1/11 to be presented and discussed in a panel at the conference.

In preparation for *Hurricanes and Scaffolding*, please read: Nora N. Kahn (2021), "Towards a Poetics of Artificial Superintelligence: How Symbolic Language Can Help Us Grasp the Nature and Power of What is Coming", *Stages* #9, 5-10,

<https://www.biennial.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Stages-9-The-Next-Biennial-Should-be-Curated-by-a-Machine.pdf>

Module 2 – METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

When: 28-29 January

Where: on Zoom

The module will focus on the question:

What do I know through my research practice and experience?

This module deals with methodological questions in research focusing on interactions between theory, practice, and modes of knowledge development. It considers research as a form of skilled practice that can range from scholarly and experimental approaches such as site-writing and drawing methodologies, to building surveys and documentations, and examples of ethnographic studies, visual work, archival and document studies, as well as performative research activities and other scientific practices. In group work, participants will discuss qualitative methods in relation to their research questions and “invent” a method for their own research project to be explored and put to the test in the following course module.

Module 3 – THEORETICAL POSITIONING

When: 10-11 March 2025

Where: on Zoom

The module will focus on the questions:

How do I/we know? What is known in my field?

The first part of the module focuses on the use of theory and the question of ‘how we know’ in research. It emphasizes the integral role of theorization in knowledge development as inseparable from practice, whether it is analytical, reflective, or speculative. The module addresses key concepts, theoretical, and philosophical works, and corresponding spatial practices. The module aims at furthering the ability to locate, articulate, and develop theoretical issues in research.

With a focus on the emergence of concepts and approaches that have guided research, this second part of the module aims at an understanding of the impact of the conditions of research. It takes into account the techno-social, cultural, political, and material practices that have shaped approaches including critical reflection on how research has responded to the changing conditions of society.

Module 4 – REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICES OF DOING ARCHITECTURAL RESEARCH

When: 4-5 June 2025

Where: Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, Delft University of Technology, Delft + Zoom

The module will focus on the question:

How to communicate the theoretical and methodological framework(s) of my research project to an audience of peers in the setting of a conference/symposium?

The fifth and final module will give participants the opportunity to present some of the insights that they have gained during this course with regards to the theoretical and methodological considerations of their research project in a conference setting. Each participant will be invited to give a brief presentation (either in person or online) to an audience of peers. Apart from a prescribed time-limit – 15 minutes – the presentation format is free. In addition to giving a presentation, each participant will also be invited to respond to (minimally) two presentations by others in the symposium. Particular emphasis will be placed not only on the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the presented research, but also on how these frameworks are communicated in the presentation.

Recommended prerequisites

Doctoral candidates are expected to read and discuss literature at a theoretical and philosophical level, to present and discuss their readings at literature seminars, to partake in workshops and to conduct independent critical and reflective thinking in the writing of a paper. To be eligible for the course, participants must be enrolled as doctoral students, have completed a master's degree or equivalent education.