

Practice based PhDs at the AD faculty

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Introduction

“AD shall integrate practice-based research as part of its research activity and develop adequate shared frames and routines in line with international standards” (translated from the Faculty’s 2018-2025 Strategy document: p.21)

The Faculty aims to develop a field of research grounded on the knowledge base that is particular for our research and education, hereunder our master programs in architecture, planning and design. As part of this goal, more PhD candidates should work with questions relevant for practice within our fields and thus make use of the competences, methods of inquiry and vocabulary that are specific for architecture, design, planning and art. This is also in line with how the European Association of Architectural Education’s (EAAE) Charter of Architectural research (2022)¹ advocates stronger links between theoretical and practice-based research.

Practice-based research is a growing methodological approach in design and architecture research and debated in most architecture, design and art schools in Europe as well as globally, and the Faculty wants to take part in international debates around this. It aims with this to contribute to building a stronger research culture among staff appointed on basis of architectural, planning, design or artistic practice and to pursue research that is perceived as relevant for practice within our fields, also outside academia.

What is a Practice-based PhD?

Practice-based research is understood as research in which the practice of architecture, planning, design or art itself is an essential component of the research process and/or the research results (Borgdorff, 2011). This is in line with what Frayling (1993) called “research ‘through’ design” as opposed to research ‘for’ or ‘into’ design and also referred to when Till (2007) writes about how to make architecture speak through research: “Research ‘through’ uses architectural design and production as a part of the research methodology itself” (ibid: 3).

The research can be based on previous or ongoing creative practices or/and research where practice in architecture, planning, design or arts are used as forms of inquiry during the investigation itself.

Practice-based PhDs attain to the same overall criteria for ‘doctorateness’ as other PhDs: significance, originality and contribution to knowledge. Even if the methodology and outcomes of the research may differ from more traditional PhDs, they are regarded as a version of scientific PhDs. This implies that the research should relate to, make use of, or critically reflect upon established epistemological and scientific approaches and methods along with the more practical elements.

Practice based PhDs are subject to NTNU’s PhD regulations for scientific degrees. They are to be distinguished from PhDs in artistic research, where the artwork is the main doctoral result. In a practice-based PhD it is the combination of practical and theoretical elements that counts. This implies that the result of the research must consist of both written and practical/creative components. The balance between the two types of components should be open for discussion in each project.

¹ <https://www.eaae.be/about/statutes-and-policypapers/eaae-charter-architectural-research/>

PhD thesis format

[NTNUs PhD regulations](#) for scientific degrees (§11.1) opens up for a combination of a textual component in combination with a (permanently documented) product or production:

“The scientific thesis may also consist of a written component in combination with a product or production documented in a permanent format. In such cases, the combined works must meet the requirements for an independent piece of research for the degree of PhD in accordance with international standards in the discipline. The Faculty may set additional requirements for the ratio of the product or production in terms of the scope or content”

This «product or production» can be a building, and object, a project or plan, a service, a design exhibition or other kinds of creative work. The «product or production» is in itself not regarded as research as such. In order to qualify as research, and not merely as practice, the PhDs must fulfil general requirements of “doctorateness”: Contextualisation, critical reflection, theoretical framework, transparency and communicability is necessary. It is therefore required that the thesis contains a written part.

The thesis could be either a monography or a compilation of a body of work. In the last case, the contextualization, theoretical framework, reflection and summary of the new knowledge developed, will in most cases be presented in the “kappa” (*comprehensive summary*). The practical/creative work can be documented in models, drawings, video, photos, diagrams or digital media. Such material must be in a retrievable form, preferably by using Research Catalogue² as a platform. PhD candidates who submit a dissertation that includes a body of creative work may choose to arrange a presentation of this work, e.g. through an exhibition, allowing the assessment committee to view it prior to the defense. The [AD Faculty’s supplementary guidelines](#) to the NTNU regulations provide more information about formats that can be considered for submitting doctoral work.

Learning outcomes

The current learning outcomes for PHAAR and PHDESIG are applicable for practice-based PhDs within the two programs.

Recruitment of candidates

The candidates should be recruited based on both practice-based and scientific skills, from master education and/or from professional practice after completed master’s degree. The master’s degree must be within architecture, planning, design or art. The candidates should also be able to demonstrate scientific writing skills.

New candidates should be appointed on basis of the recommendation of an expert assessment committee in which minimum one of three members have experience from supervising practice-based PhDs and members from minimum two schools/universities.

Research topics

The topics of practice-based PhDs should reflect fields identified as highly relevant for practice within architecture, planning, design and art. It is up to each department to specify topics in announcements of new positions.

² <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/>

Supervising competence and capacity

In line with the ADs supplementary guidelines to the PhD regulations, one of the supervisors (usually the main supervisor) should have experiences from supervising PhD-candidates to successful completion. In addition, at least one of the supervisors should be active within practice-based research.

Academic training

Like all PhD candidates in PHAAR and PHDESIG, all candidates working on a practice-based PhD at AD should take either the mandatory course AAR8320: *Introduction to research methods and theories of science for PhD Candidates* (7.5 credits) or PD8300: *Topics in Design Research*.

In addition, all candidates should take one course more specifically on practice-based research methodology (minimum 7.5 credits).

References

- Borgdorff, Henk (2011): "The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research" in Biggs, M. and Karlsson, H. (eds): *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*. Oxon / New York: Routledge. Chapter 3, p.44-63
- Frayling, Christopher (2003): "Research in Art and Design" in *Royal College of Art Research Papers*, 1993/4, vol 1 no1, p 1-5
- Till, Jeremy (2007): "Architectural Research: Three Myths and One Model", available at <http://www.jeremytill.net/> (accessed 2018-11-11)