AN EMPIRICAL STUDY:
Design Intentions and Experiential Reality in Atria

By

TSE PEK MUN
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Abstract

In most introductory treatments of behaviour-based design, it has become a common practice to speak of "the gap". For the purpose of discussion, one interpretation of "the gap" is the mismatch between the architect's design intentions and the users' experiential reality. It is often been said that the reason for the architect not being able to predict the consequences for human behaviour accurately is due to the divergence of perceptions and intentions between the architect and users. Recently, there has been a growing concern and need to research into and understand this person-environment relationship in order to narrow "the gap" as much as possible. The beginnings of this concern may be dated back as far as 1 March 1969 during a conference which aims to discuss ideas and results from research of relevance to both architecture and psychology. During the conference, one of the speakers, Roger M. Wools raised the following issue in response to the lack of research in this area.

"The architect has been fairly well equipped with tools to measure the physical performance of buildings. There are very good thermometers, decibel meters and photometric instruments, and there is an impressive science behind each of these techniques to build frameworks to predict accurately the conditions inside projected buildings. But where are the behavioural thermometers, meters and instruments? As architects, or aspiring architects, when we do ask this question we faced by a great disappointment – at present, there are few available."

Therefore, the dissertation will aim to explore these potential "behavioural thermometers" and carry out one aspect of such research. By employing principles from the Human Ecological Approach established by the Vienna School of Human Ecology as its theoretical framework, the dissertation hopes to concretise the above concern in the research on human behaviour in atriums of shopping centres. Research will be carried out in two of the largest shopping centres in Singapore; Raffles City and Ngee Ann City. Ultimately, the dissertation will try to gather evidence, through the comparison of data collected on the architect's design intentions and behaviour of the users, to prove or disprove the existence of "the gap".

Dissertation Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Lam Khee Poh
Title: Acting Dean of Faculty of Architecture, Building and Real Estate

1 Bell (1996)
2 Baum and Valins (1977), pg. 3
3 Conference held at Dalandhui, University of Strathclyde, 28 February-2 March 1969
4 Canter, David (1970), pg. 48-49