



ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCHERS IN CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT

Beyond Surveys and Interviews Doctoral Workshop Programme: Rethinking Construction Management Research Methods in Disruptive Times

Globally, the Covid-19 pandemic has created severe disruptions to our everyday lives, and these include new challenges confronted by the research process. In a field that has a longstanding interest in engaging with practice and practitioners, safe distancing measures and lockdowns mean that it is more difficult to get close to both. The purpose of this workshop is therefore to bring together researchers in Construction Management research to share experiences and ideas on how we can overcome Covid-19 disruptions to our research practice. This is also a moment for us to rethink our conventional methods (e.g. surveys and interviews that inform case study research) to search for novel and creative ways of addressing our research questions in the field.

Five provocations helped frame the workshop discussions. In the first provocation, Professor Giorgio Locatelli (University of Leeds) kicked off proceedings by prompting participants to think about preparation and about seizing the opportunities. On preparation, Giorgio suggested the need to keep abreast with reading and he offered some tips on how he does this by browsing new feeds in the key journals during his daily morning coffee. He also encouraged participants to read around the topic areas so that this preparatory reading can allow for a much broader perspective. This broader perspective can also insulate the researcher against sudden shocks (like Covid-19) and embrace opportunities when these arise. Giorgio showed an example of how he analysed perspectives of risks and uncertainty by analysing secondary data and already-published information (e.g. from the press).

Professor Emerita Christine Räsänen (Chalmers University of Technology) urged the participants to be creative and walk on the wild side. She shared a few examples from her previous research into communication practices by using video cameras and practitioner diaries. In the age of digital and social media, there are many tools and (mobile) apps that can be used to capture a glimpse of what goes on in the world of practice. It is important to note, though, that there is no method that is without any shortcomings. Therefore, Christine also encouraged participants to think through their methods, make a strategic choice of what is feasible, and always have a back-up plan.

Dr. Maja Kevdžija (TU Wien) followed on after Christine by sharing her research that builds on shadowing and observational research. In her recent study, she worked with students to analyse how people comply with safe distancing requirements. In two different lockdown periods, Maja noted that her observational research had to change, from face-to-face observation to using video footage from surveillance cameras. Maja noted that there were differences between the two ways of observing practices. The surveillance footage captured a much broader range of activities, and there are also ethical considerations that need to be accounted for. Maja also noted that it is important to always reflect on whether the data analysis is still answering the research question.

Professor Emeritus Will Hughes (University of Reading) also emphasised the importance of the research question and problem. It is important to position the research against previous studies by asking: “What is the general class of problem that your specific question is an example of?” Therefore, it is important not to start with the method, but rather to start with what problem or phenomenon you are trying to understand and address... and ask the question “why?”. Will also questioned the dominance of surveying and interviewing practitioners to understand the world of practice. It is important to note that what people do and what people say they do are different things. Furthermore, it does not make sense to think that practitioners have the answers to the questions we have in our research.

Dr. Emmanuel Manu (Nottingham Trent University) shared his final provocation with us about the value of secondary research. Emmanuel explained that there is a large range of secondary data that one can draw on which could form part or even the whole of the research process. There is, for instance, value in doing systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Company reports, official publications and even social media may also be useful bases for providing data to help answer our research questions. Therefore, there is a lot of missed opportunities if we ignore secondary research. Of course, it is important to pay attention to the research question, especially if one draws on secondary data that was intended for answering a different question. For more information, there is a recent book co-edited by Emmanuel: <https://www.routledge.com/Secondary-Research-Methods-in-the-Built-Environment/Manu-Akotia/p/book/9780367429874>

Some key points that came up in the discussion:

- It is important to read and take notes (preparation), and network with stakeholders (opportunity).
- Collect secondary data when possible.
- Look at different online tools, and try to work with methods that don't require face-to-face contact.
- Be mindful when observing practice. How much of that 'practice' is the everyday normal, and how much of that is the exceptional as a result of Covid-19?
- It is worth noting that Construction Management Research today is much broader than conventional surveys and interviews. Construction Management Research nowadays integrates perspectives from many disciplines like psychology, computer programming, etc, which widens our choices for research methods.

Interesting Papers

Tips on how to conceptualise a research project

<https://will-hughes.blogspot.com/2015/07/conceptualizing-research-project.html>

A review of Social Network Analysis

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0041911>

An example of Big Data Analytics that can be employed by Construction Management researchers

<http://mozdeh.wlv.ac.uk/>

A very interesting example of using job advertisements as secondary data of BIM-related jobs analysis published in *Automation in Construction*

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S092658051630259X>

On visual methodologies in general

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/1467-954X.00230>

Behavioural mapping

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781119162124.ch3>

Shadowing

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/QROM-09-2012-1100/full/html>

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1077800408318318>

Walk-along interview

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18606557/>