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Title: Using the Delphi method in an interdisciplinary setting: opportunities and implications

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The Delphi method is a data-collection technique which is usually applied when experts need to achieve agreement on a topic. Experts are independently questioned in several rounds using a standardized questionnaire. Communication among experts is controlled by the researcher who provides feedback to the experts in the form of a summary of the findings of the previous round. Based on this feedback, experts may change their opinion in the next round. This procedure continues until a certain level of agreement has been achieved or until a pre-specified number of rounds has been completed.

The Delphi method offers opportunities for bringing together experts from different disciplines and allowing them to find common grounds. In this study the Delphi method was applied within the discipline of landscape architecture. Landscape architecture is highly interdisciplinary, because some landscape architects are educated as engineers, while others are educated as designers/artists. Additionally, there is a strong divide between landscape architects who work in academia and those who work in professional practice.

It was discovered that the use of the Delphi method in an interdisciplinary setting has certain implications. First, the sampling of experts with different backgrounds may require different selection criteria and search strategies. Second, the great variety of different views on the topic of interest needs to be taken into account in the design of the questionnaire. Third, the level of agreement among experts may remain rather low throughout the study, shifting the focus of the study to the identification and description of disagreement rather than agreement. As part of a built-in experiment, the study also provided insight into the effect of different types of feedback on the level of agreement among experts.

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