

# Holistic Research for Holistic Practice

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# Apparent disjunction

## Permaculture

Applied

Socially open/free

Equality

Solutions oriented

Openness

Values based

Contextual

Progressive

## Research

Academic

Socially closed/restricted

Hierarchy

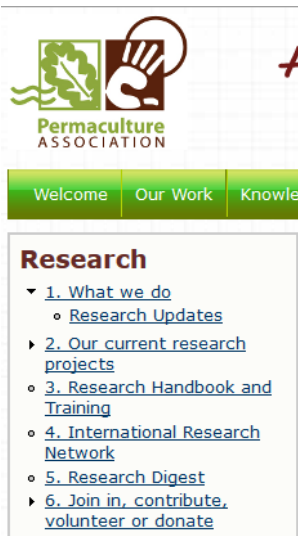
Problems oriented

Scepticism

Facts based

Universal

Conservative



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# Ideals of the Academy

- Meritocratic not autocratic
- Socratic dialogue – to draw out not dictate
- Best ideas win out through examination of evidence and reasoned debate
- Peer review not government control
- Socially and personally transformative
- Research to serve a common good
- Aim of widening participation and cultural enrichment
- Uphold standards of quality



***Thus not so far apart in  
intention as it might seem***

# A meeting of permaculture and research should be possible, but

## **Disciplinary nature of academic research**

- Where does PC fit: horticulture, ecology, agriculture, anthropology, geography, agroecology ...? This will determine the tools

## **Experimental norm of isolating variables**

- How to cope with whole systems or context specificity vs generalisable findings?

## **Demand of objectivity and avoidance of observer effect**

- Where does this leave the attitudinal values of PC?

## **Demand of falsifiability**

- Does this fit the proselytising style of PC with its continual return to founding texts, e.g., what potential evidence would we accept that it doesn't work?

# New developments in research

Disciplinarity	Shift toward <b>transdisciplinarity</b> as a response to the complexity of real world issues.
Experimental method	<b>Participatory</b> research models, citizen science, web2 tools for sharing.
Objectivity	Self-examination and <b>critical reflection</b> as core to qualitative research.
Falsifiability	<b>Practicality</b> = rejecting what doesn't work.

# 12 Principles

## From Holmgren

1. *Observe and interact*
2. *Catch and store energy*
3. *Obtain a yield*
4. *Apply self-regulation and accept feedback*
5. *Use and value renewable resources and services*
6. *Produce no waste*

## Interpreted for research

- Be observant and use delicate experiments
- Record and share findings
- Consolidate findings and publish
- Avoid self-deception, give and receive feedback
- Share methods and repeat experiments — don't reinvent unnecessarily
- Record everything

## From Holmgren

- 7. Design from patterns to details*
- 8. Integrate rather than segregate*
- 9. Use small and slow solutions*
- 10. Use and value diversity*
- 11. Use edges and value the marginal*
- 12. Creatively use and respond to change*

## Interpreted for research

- Be responsive to nature in shaping your questions
- Collaborate on research questions build a community of practice
- Gather evidence over many iterations
- Use many methods and techniques
- Don't focus on single benefits, e.g., yield
- Find out what others are doing and respond to it

# *Observe and interact* - Use delicate experiments

“There is a delicate empiricism which makes itself utterly identical with the object, thereby becoming true theory”.

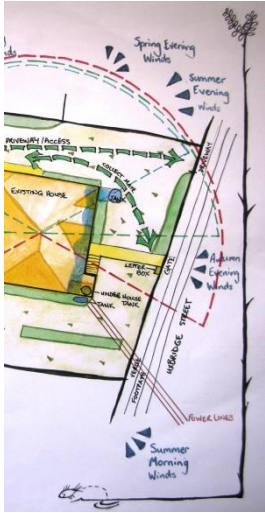
Goethe J.W. ‘Maxims and Reflections’ in *Scientific Studies* p.307.

Goethean science as one means to integrate human being in research and respond to nature as a system/process.





# *Catch and store energy* - Record and share findings



- Good tradition in PC of recording observation, as part of design process
- Daily log of activity and include self-reflection
- Select key questions
- Use <https://www.permaculture.org.uk/research/3-research-handbook-and-training>
- Continue to develop a common language and set of standards
- Post results on open access
- Publish new findings, accurately presented, in permaculture journals.

Image from <http://makingsenseofthings.info/2010/11/urban-permaculture-in-practice/>

# *Integrate rather than segregate - Collaborate on research questions*



Urban and peri-urban agriculture  
Transcending poverty alleviation  
change mitigation and adaptation

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## ARTICLE INFO

Article history:  
Received 11 May 2013  
Revised 16 September 2013  
Accepted 30 October 2013

Keywords:  
Urban agriculture  
Urban forestry  
Climate Change  
Adaptation  
Mitigation  
Urban Africa

## ABSTRACT

A range of published literature has underlined the importance of urban and forestry published literature in terms of service provision, particularly in the context of unavoidable climate change. This paper reports on the results of a literature review of the published literature on the effects of

As above but also:

- Use what is out there in academic research: horticulture, agriculture, agroecology, conservation, ecology etc.
- Contribute to it, where necessary adopting aspects of its research methods.
- Open a dialogue about more holistic methods.

# Creative tension between positivity and criticality



# Keep positive but also questioning

- Through research you might be able to convince others of the efficacy of a PC practice.
- Through research you might have to throw away a long cherished PC practice (or at least compost it!)

**That's the nature of research**

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