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## **A CASE STUDY: THE JURY PROCESS IN AN IDEAS COMPETITION FOR A SMALL URBAN CENTRE**

**LEIF ÖSTMAN**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is a single case study report about the jury process in an ideas competition, including a brief overview of the relevant literature. The goal of the competition was to find new ideas for the redevelopment of the county centre of Korsholm on the west coast of Finland. The jury process ended with a decision to select two winners, despite the clear interest of the architect's association and the Finnish competition rules expecting only one definitive winner to be selected and thus providing a planning commission. The aim of the present study has been to articulate the jury process, its constitution, interaction processes, turning points and decision making. Jury processes are always secret, and hence currently we have hardly any descriptions of them, but they are central in the process of selecting high-rank solutions for architecture and urban development, as well as for the promotion of careers and commissions. It is thus important to study and analyze their role within both the professional and public sphere. The paper confirms H el ene Lipstadt's ideas concerning a need for a rupture from the researcher's professional insider perspective. It provides a sociological perspective on competitions and jury work, implying that architecture research must avoid the danger of confirming assumptions stemming from a professional ideology. The assumption which is confirmed is that jurors are not disinterested and equal participants in a selection process, but stakeholders in a struggle, defending professional values and the right of their profession to decide about qualities related to planning

Key words:

Case study, Jury process,  
Assessment, Competition  
Winner, Decision making



## Introduction

This paper is a case study report about the jury process in an ideas competition. The goal of the competition in question was to find new ideas for the redevelopment of the county centre of Korsholm on the west coast of Finland. The aim of the present study has been to articulate the jury process, its constitution, interaction processes, turning points and decision making. It is a single case study in which the competition and its jury process are but one step in a long design operation that alters the urban structure. I also apply the field theory of Bourdieu (1996) and the interpretations of Lipstadt (2010) regarding the competition process to conceptualize and interpret my observations. One reason I decided to conduct the case study is that jury processes are always secret, and hence currently we have hardly any descriptions of these processes apart from the mostly rather simple jury protocols describing the solutions and qualities, but nothing about the jury process. I see the case study as a means to enhance the understanding of jury processes, and consider this understanding to be useful both for practitioners who act in juries or submit proposals and for researchers who study and try to develop the understanding of design competitions. I think it is even more important to study design competitions concerning urban planning as these are related to civic society and its democratic processes, with a clear emphasis on transparency and democratic decision making.<sup>1</sup> Until recently, there were only a few investigations of architectural design competitions in the Nordic countries according to Svensson (2008, p. 4) and her licentiate thesis seems to be the only one to have examined the jury process. There is currently very little reporting in the field of design competitions based on empirical research. Another reason for conducting this case study is the importance of design competitions in regard to both publicity and reputation – for both the promoter and the winning architect – and as a contracting procedure with new clients. The jury process is central in the process of selecting high-rank solutions for architecture and urban development, as well as for the promotion of careers and commissions and it is thus important to study and analyze its role within both the professional and public sphere.

Smedsby is the centre of the rural county of Korsholm, close to the town of Vasa on the west coast of Finland. The competition in question was initiated on the basis of a preliminary invitation for letters of interest, followed by an invited competition to which four of the 55 interested architects were invited (KST 302/2008). The competition schedule ran from late 2008 till September 2009, when the results of the jury process were published. It started with a first meeting of the jury in Smedsby on June 5, 2009 and the two winners, White Architects, with the entry «Transekter», and WSP Finland, with the entry «Smide», were announced three months later.

- 1 The jury process can also be seen as a human inquiry in itself, where the jury analyses the urban situation, the proposals and their qualities and then evaluates them – in a pragmatist sense denoting a normal human activity, a learning process. The task of research is to impose more systematic and logical analysis of the same processes.

This paper starts with a presentation of the approach and the methodology, followed by a presentation of the design brief and the competition. The jury process is accounted for in chronological order, starting with the first jury meeting and finalized with the announcement of the results. The paper confirms Lipstadt's (2010) ideas about a need for a rupture and consequently research about the situation as a cultural field. It also produces a sociological perspective on competitions and jury work, that architecture research must avoid the danger of confirming assumptions stemming from a professional ideology. The assumption which is confirmed is that jurors are not disinterested and equal participants in a selection process, but stakeholders in a struggle, defending professional values and the right of their profession to decide about qualities related to planning.

### Approach and methodology

The best literary source on architectural competitions in Finland is Kazemian, Rönn and Svensson's study *Arkitekturtävlingar. Erfarenheter från Finland* (2007). Competitions are here seen as a developmental force, strengthening the profession and educating the clients. Their investigation is based on their informants, who are well-known architects with competition and jury experience (Kazemian, Rönn and Svensson 2007, p. 157). They express some criticism towards the current competition production, but remain positive in their acceptance of competitions as an important tool for the development of architecture. The authors conclude their study of the competition practices in Finland by expressing their findings as nine dilemmas based mainly on the conflicting interests embedded in the assessment process (Ibid. p. 163). The dilemmas they outline are about:

- the need for both democracy and professional independence
- the need for both innovation and reliability
- the need for precision in the competition brief, but also the need of space for action
- the need for a correspondence between the virtual reality of the competition and the later built environment
- the need for innovation versus fault minimization
- the danger of dismissing the initial programme, due to the learning element within the competition process
- a need to have both a good process and a good resulting object
- competing interests between society and the profession
- the complicated combination of local history and the desired new future

Kazemian, Rönn and Svensson point out that it is central to the profession to study the assessment processes and how jury members deal with these dilemmas (Ibid., p. 168). The comments of the interviewed architects in their study clearly address their innovative potential, producing new and better architecture, and simultaneously articulating



an idea about stimulating the clients to embrace new approaches to architecture (Ibid., p. 158f). In a later paper on this same subject, Rönn (2009) concludes that it seems that competitions «are an institution that generates development and creativity», and that there is an advantage in «the bringing together of different interests, the system's innovative influence and the possibility of creating a foundation for qualified assessment at an early stage.»

Spector (2001) has addressed a particular dilemma in the architects' profession, namely the conflict arising from two different positions in relation to the public. On the one hand there is a commercial interest in the services of architects where «power rules», and on the other hand the architects have a professional responsibility to defend aesthetic values and anonymous user and public interests (Spector 2001, p. 5ff). According to Spector, this can be seen as a silent contract with society, and it can also be analyzed by means of conflict theory (Ibid.). The contract theory assumes that there is an unspoken contract between the profession and society, handing the responsibility for architectural decision making to the architects' profession, while simultaneously allowing them greater artistic freedom in these matters (Ibid. p. 23), something Lipstadt attributes to «the competition's disinterested contribution to society» and, with reference to Sudjic, «acknowledgement of architecture's cultural role» (Lipstadt, 2010). There is no clear answer to these diverging interpretations of the role of architects and thus also of the role of architectural competitions in society. The competitions can be seen as a tool for producing services for society, or they can be seen as tools for securing power and professional influence. Commonly the services are described in terms of the furthering of architectural quality, bold innovation, defining social values, allowing young entrants access to the professional market, contributing with solutions and the debate about architectural values (Lipstadt 2010; Kazemian, Rönn and Svensson, 2007). Lipstadt finds that these statements show a striking resemblance to «the commonplaces of ordinary knowledge of the world of architecture», in her view asking for a more critical approach among architectural researchers (Lipstadt, 2010, p. 53). Stevens (1998) is another researcher who has also embraced a Bourdieusian perspective, analyzing the architectural field and its agents and institutions according to the field theory of Bourdieu (1996). Hence Stevens sees architecture as a profession, a discipline and a field. The profession and the disciplines are subgroups within the field, and the relations to society and clients are important. Stevens sees the architectural field as highly differentiated with dominating and dominated groups, yet still holding less symbolic capital than other artistic fields (Ibid. p. 97). He also sees a dependence on the powerful elite in society. The competition is a situation where the architects can avoid external forces, and exercise an architectural autonomy (Ibid.). Simultaneously, the competitions are also tools for the ruling classes in society, where the competitors and the competitions serve the ruling class (Ibid.,

p. 98). Stevens uses the metaphor of a battlefield to describe the architectural field, that is, a struggle for position and symbolic capital.

Lipstadt (2010) addresses a methodological concern, or maybe an epistemological criticism, concerning a common affirmative understanding of professional values among architectural researchers. Elsewhere I myself (Östman, 2005) in comprehensive studies of architectural design processes have also accepted the professional inside perspective of architects as a necessary competence in staying close to professional practices. Lipstadt (2010) argues that a field-oriented approach is necessary in architectural research as a tool for overcoming the inherent danger of confirming professional values instead of securing valid new findings. The role of the architects (and in this case study the jurors) thus is not one of a disinterested service, but rather one with individual interests related to different social networks and a battle for a position and a defence of contested professional values of the architects. In a Bourdieusian interpretation it is primarily a battle for symbolic capital and a position to dominate and evaluate what is the right and good quality (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 252ff). I think Lipstadt's proposal is important in architectural research as a means to strengthen its acceptance. Thus I conclude with an analysis of the jury process based on the ideas of architecture as a cultural field, with inherent tensions between different positions, instead of focusing on the professional values and architectural qualities.

Knowing how little research-based material exists concerning competitions, already during the second meeting of the jury in the Smedsby competition I realized, acting as an invited juror, the potential for a case study and so began making systematic notes at the meetings. I wanted to avoid any change in the setting, so I withheld my idea about writing a case study report until the end of the last jury meeting, when I asked for permission to make this report available to the research community. I was given this permission without any restrictions, except that I should wait some time to avoid interference with the publishing of the results. In a similar way, normal preparatory administrative processes and also the internal negotiations at courts of law are kept secret (Decree on the Openness of Government Activities and on Good Practice in Information Management, 1999) for reasons of promoting a free exchange of points of view and independency (Helsinki Court of Appeal district, 2007). According to the Association of Finnish Architects (SAFA) Competition Rules 2008, Ch. 9), only the jury (and jury secretary) can follow the jury process.

The material for the case study consists of notes, the material submitted as part of the entries, the jury protocol and some comments given after the results were published. The case report has been complemented by the reading, «member checking» of this text as a form of triangulation (Stake, 1995, p. 114f), by some of the jurors (the chairperson, two officials and the professional jurors), and complemented by means of interviews.

In the following characterization I use the vocabulary of Robert Yin to describe the methodology of this case study. The present case study aims to reveal insights into situations normally not accessible to research, a so-called «revelatory case» (Yin, 1984, p. 41). The study consists of an «embedded design» consisting of a multitude of elements (Ibid. p. 44) and can be seen as a «rich» case study. The central units of analysis are: *the jury process and its turning points*, and *acceptance of quality descriptions*. The case study is to a large extent based on the author's *participant observation*. The methodological goal is to construct a *chain of evidence* (Yin, 1984, p. 96) by providing independent facts and information to a degree that the interpretations acquire author-independent reliability. The interpretations aim at *explanation-building*, but the primary aim is to provide readers with a picture of the jury process. The aim is not to provide a general model for the interpretation of jury processes, but rather to provide insights into such a process. As a matter of fact, the case study reveals a number of interesting issues and questions, thus indicating topics for further research. I think it is also necessary to know that I, as a participant juror and involved in the assessment process, am satisfied with the outcome of the jury process. I see no need to use the case study as a tool for promoting private ideas or conclusions about the result, nor do I see any need to defend this result as the only possible one, but rather I want to make this jury process public. My defence for the choice of method is that there are very few options available for any attempt to articulate what is going on in a jury process. As the main objective of the study is the process description, the number of illustrations is limited.

## The competition

The competition process consisted of:

1. The administrative preparations
2. The design stage
3. The jury process
4. The publication
5. The post-jury stage

These stages are presented below, together with some of my immediate reflections made shortly after each jury meeting, as well as some comments regarding the actions taken after the competition in order to implement the results and indicating the value of the follow-up commissions.

## Background

The competition process was initiated mainly by the need for greater changes in the urban structure, due to the fact that the main road passing through Smedsby, the E8, will be reorganized with the completion of a by-pass moving the long distance traffic outside the centre and thus

leaving the centre with an over-dimensioned road, but also allowing for more crossings and potentially new uses of road sides. The aim of the competition was to find ideas for a revision of the existing master plan. Point 3 of the competition brief states that «the competitors shall without prejudice invent planning potential and produce innovative alternatives» (Kommunstyrelsen, 2009b). According to the chairperson of the jury, it was also clearly understood that the brief must allow for increased density and new developments to strengthen the centre as a service centre (Chairperson, 2010). The chairperson also stated that the problem with parking space was discussed a lot, and that its lack must not be an obstacle for visitors to the centre (shoppers or those using other services) (Chairperson, 2011). My question regarding where the brief's request for a «clearer block structure» came from did not elicit any reply (Ibid). The county planning engineer said that the competition must be seen as an answer to and defence against the long-standing idea of incorporating the county and Smedsby centre into the neighbouring town structure (Malinen, 2010). The competition included areas with public and commercial services, a market square, some park areas, schools, residential areas consisting of multi-storey apartments and single-family units, and a few unused sites and left over areas (Kommunstyrelsen, 2009b).

The land ownership is mostly private, but there are a few free sites and the reduction of the size of the main road will provide some space for new developments. The current market square is rather hidden within the urban structure, and according to the competition brief it can be

Picture 1. Aerial photo of the centre of Smedsby, seen from the south (Suomen Ilmakuva Ltd).



used as space for new buildings as long as there is a replacement somewhere else (Kommunstyrelsen, 2009b). The prognoses expect the number of inhabitants to increase by 1000 to about 6000 people within the next 20 years. The goal of the competition was to generate proposals for a clear and active county centre, attractive and visible for housing, developers, and communication (Kommunstyrelsen, 2009b). The competition brief includes statements arguing that this can be achieved by means of (Ibid):

- representative access points to the centre
- proposals for how to use the space around the current main road
- a good network of roads, including walking and bicycle routes
- clear and visible areas for commerce and public buildings
- proposals for housing, both as rental and ownership housing
- a good and varied offer of educational and cultural services
- varied summer activities
- sustainable solutions for the car parking
- gardening measures
- a more visible market square

The proposals were to be delivered on a maximum of five A1-sized panels (Kommunstyrelsen, 2009b), including the following material:

- Planning solution to the whole area, 1:5000
- Plan-based illustrations, 1:2000
- Environment illustrations
- An urban planning concept
- A traffic network scheme
- A written description of the proposal

### The administrative preparations

The competition brief was put together by a working group, consisting of non-architects, and led by the same person who was chairperson of the jury (Chairperson, 2010). The preparation of the competition brief was supported by examples of competition briefs from other competitions (Chairperson, 2010). The brief was produced in cooperation with SAFA, and without any problems. The task was described by the chairperson as «demanding». The brief was later approved by the county council. Engineer (M.Sc) Jari Vesanen was appointed as competition secretary due to his cooperation with the chairperson in a previous competition. According to the SAFA Competition Rules, the promoter must provide a competition brief with binding instructions and recommendations for the competitors, but also explain how the promoter intends to follow up the result of the competition (further commissioned planning work). Also according to the rules, one third of the jury must be professionals, and one of them must be an independent professional juror (SAFA, 2008). Invitations (Kommunstyrelsen, 2009) to participate in the competition must be published according to the fairly recently passed legislation regarding public procurement (Public Procurement Act, 2007). This means

that the competition is open to any potential bids within the European Union. The fact that there is a tendering interest also from international parties made the preparations difficult (Chairperson, 2010). The working group had the problem of making a good but limited selection from 55 tenders. The budget was set at 60.000 € + 10.000 € and in an invited competition each participant gets a share; for example, with four participants they each would receive 15.000 €, and with an extra bonus for the winner (Ibid). The jury did not participate in the invitee selection process, but according to the chairperson it was very difficult to compare the received references and in a comprehensive appraisal in accordance with given criteria (such as experience from similar projects, capacity and competence) many of the interested architects would receive full marks thus leaving the resulting selection too large (Ibid.). The final selection is based on a «best value» principle (Kommunstyrelsen, 2009; Arbetsgruppen för utvecklande av Smedsby centrum, 2009). The received references were of mixed quality, varying from short texts to comprehensive descriptions. Very many of the bidders were rejected without any deeper analyses, because their references looked as if they were routinely sent without any acknowledgment of the given commission. The working group looked among the references to find architects who could offer something innovative to their type of project (Chairperson, 2010).

The county council had appointed the jury, consisting of four leading officials from the Korsholm County, five leading politicians, two external professional jurors and an independent juror, the architect Henu Kjisik, who was selected by the competitors in accordance with the SAFA competition rules (SAFA, 2008). The independent juror is a professional expert and is independent in relation to both the promoter and the competitors (Ibid). The planning engineer is not an architect but counted as a professional due to his professional position. I myself acted as a professional juror. I am currently living in the neighbouring county, with earlier experience of practice and preparing competition entries, but since 1996 I have held a teaching position. Mostly only the officials, the professional jurors and the chairman of the community council attended the jury meetings. The jury was chaired by the head of the local adult education institute. She also chaired the working group for the development of the Smedsby centre, having been appointed by the county council to collect ideas and to create a vision for the development of the centre. Only one of the professional jurors, the independent juror, and the chairperson had previous experience of jury work. The independent juror had experience of both winning competitions and jury work. Parallel to the competition there was also another competition open to children attending schools in the centre. I have tried to keep the jurors' individual statements anonymous, but due to their specific positions the chairperson, the community planning engineer and the independent juror have agreed that their statements can be attributed openly.



## The jury process

### The first jury meeting, June 5, 2009: Opening the entries.

The first meeting began with some formalities and a short presentation of the jurors (Vesanen, 2009). The meeting was clearly in the hands of the chairperson. Three politicians, one official and the independent professional juror were missing (Östman, 2009). The next step was to open the envelopes and check if the entries fulfilled the requirements and could be accepted. The names of the entries are: *By och mur*, *Smedsby trädgårdsby*, *Smide*, and *Transekter*. I felt that there was an expectation of something interesting. I sensed a certain preference for the entry *By och mur* which showed some kind of striking clarity. At first glance I myself found it difficult to accept *Smide* and *Transekter* (Ibid.). In the first general discussion it was concluded that these entries had primarily focused on the architecture, presuming this approach was less correct (Ibid.). After the opening discussion the meeting was cut short with some agreements that the entries must be kept available for the jurors and about how to proceed with the assessment process. The chairperson stressed the necessity to keep the proposals secret, so as to avoid a public debate beforehand. The press had already contacted the chairperson, asking for the results (Ibid.). At the next meeting the planning engineer was to present problems and the potential of each entry in relation to the existing urban situation and the jury would take a walking tour in the centre because the other professional jurors did not know the area (Ibid.). All the lay jurors knew the area well. In the meantime copies of the proposals were to be sent to all jurors. I think we all got the feeling that something was missing from this meeting because the independent juror was not in attendance. In his absence one of the professional jurors, with previous experience from competition juries, explained the organization of jury work (Ibid.).

The entries in the order they were opened (shown here only with the plan-based illustrations) (Vesanen, 2009):



1. By och mur



2. Smedsby trädgårdsby



3. Smide



4. Transekter

Drawings 1-4. Plan drawings.



### The second meeting June 17, 2009.

We had prepared for the next meeting by studying the copies of the proposals sent to us. Now all professional jurors were in attendance (Vesänen, 2009). It was early summer, just before people left for their summer holidays, and most people were busy. Only a short time was spent in the beginning looking at the full size presentation panels, though only a few of the jurors had used the opportunity to study the panels in full size. One professional juror and one of the civil servants had studied the panels, and the latter had written a statement because he was not attending (Lay juror, 2009). The planning engineer had conducted a map-based analysis but did not present any clear statements about the entries (Malinen, 2009).<sup>2</sup> The jurors asked only a few clarifying questions. The prize money was discussed, too, and the independent juror explained that it is a normal procedure to articulate the critique of the winning entry by stating which qualities it lacks, whereas the critiques of the non-winning entries should highlight their positive qualities (Östman, 2009b). After a short discussion the jury left the building for a walking tour around the centre. During the two-hour walk the jurors discussed what they noticed in the centre; the ugliness of the county hall, the over-sized parking lot at the adult education centre, and the potential to reroute the traffic through the centre along the Alma road, which would be necessary in the proposal *By och mur*. Someone pointed out the difficulty of overcoming the differences in height between the road and the road sides north

<sup>2</sup> The planning engineer did not see it as his task to present any definitive conclusions about the entries (Interview 16.6. 2010).



Drawing 5. *Transekter* includes a distinct axis between the community centre and a new market square.

of the road. One of the professional jurors pointed out the importance of the visual connection between the market and the community centre. It was a sunny summer day and it seemed as if we all enjoyed the walk (Ibid.).



Drawing 6. Road network, illustration of the conflict between the historical road line and the *By och mur*-solution. The straight line of the main road has been replaced with a series of open public spaces, whereas the other road is preserved as a curve around the centre.

When we returned to the meeting room we started with an informal discussion about the qualities of the entries, starting each with an input from the professional jurors. I volunteered to be the first speaker in each case but tried to leave the presentation open for others to express opposite opinions. For example, I presented a positive opinion of *By och mur*, but sensed that the initial positive assessment had faded and combined my positive evaluation with some negative aspects, too (Östman, 2009b). This I did as a manner of avoiding getting caught in a locked position. The planning engineer pointed out that the professional jurors seemed to reach a certain level of agreement (Ibid.). The independent juror clearly rejected *By och mur* as mistaken and inadequate within this particular urban structure. In his opinion the main road is a historical fact and form, and a line that must not be broken (Ibid.). Suddenly we all saw and accepted this conclusion. This was the first conclusion in a series of conclusions, contributing to the web of conclusions that constituted the basis for the final selection of winners. These conclusions are not really noticed in the meeting protocol, but each juror selects his arguments and conclusions from this web, and reuses them if he finds it useful and adequate in the following discussions, sometimes with the aim of supporting his argumentation, sometimes as a clarification of an entry or in a context in the centre. By now we all knew that *By och mur* had lost. I, myself, had entered this jury process with the idea that Smedsby centre would need a radical change in its current structure and the dominant main road, but in this situation the shift of position came

very easily. I adopted the conclusion of the independent juror. Some of us now faced a moment of indecision. Which entry meets the requirements of the competition brief? My colleague sitting next to me whispered that he had a new favourite, but did not disclose it to me (Östman, 2009b). The meeting proceeded rather fast. Another shared new insight was that the brief asked for «increased density and a clear block structure» (Kommunstyrelsen, 2009b). The focus in the discussions concentrated on the very centre of Smedsby, and the peripheral areas seemed not to matter so much. We agreed that the market square is a key issue (Östman, 2009b). I found that we profited from the competence of the independent juror (Ibid.). He picked out important aspects and solutions very easily and convinced us that certain solutions are better than others. He supported our process of seeing qualities. We all took part in the discussions and expressed personal analyses, opinions and took a position, but we seldom disagreed fully and remained open to other ways of interpreting the entries (Ibid.). Soon members of the jury started leaving in order to attend other meetings, and the meeting decided that all professional jurors must deliver a written analysis to the next meeting, due six weeks later.

My conclusions from the meeting were as follows (Östman, 2009):

- *By och mur* is out of the game
- The market square and the architecture have been brought back into the discussion, despite the architecture being very different from the current one
- The independent juror wants all historical road structures to show
- This is about deconstructing the big main road, about supporting an axis to the community centre, and we have all realized that *Transekter* includes all these qualities
- There is an obvious need to demolish some of the existing buildings in the centre, an issue which to the county's officials seems impossible
- It seems sympathetic to move the county's administration to a new location (presented in one of the entries) closer to the market square, even if it would be a very big project
- In the entries there are a lot of structures added on to the present buildings, but they seem exaggerated and are feasible only if demolition is not an option





Drawing 7. Excerpt from *Transekt* as an example of added-on structures in the entries.

My conclusions about the jury process were as follows (Östman, 2009b):

- The jury work is problematic because there is no perfect or optimal solution
- The jury constitutes a heterogeneous group, with differing perspectives, and it can be subdivided by various terms
- There are informal but functional group dynamics, with the professional jurors as a group having a clear identity in this setting, in contrast to the lay jurors but also with the independent juror and the chairperson as distinct agents, and the divide between those living in the county and those from outside
- The lay jurors are experienced leaders, but in the jury work they clearly rely on the professional jurors as experts
- It is difficult to anticipate the assessments of the others
- There is a group reflection going on in the jury, constructed by means of the individuals' personal reflections, in steps such as:
  1. Study and see qualities
  2. Propose points of view
  3. Test points of view in the jury
  4. Listen
  5. Accept or ignore (there are many viewpoints presented during the jury process that we immediately dismiss and no longer recall)
- I expect the independent juror to provide clearer guidance later on, seeing it as supporting our evaluation process
- The county's planning engineer is strongly tied to the reality of the county planning office
- The county's planning engineer clearly, though respectfully and kindly, positions himself in a disinterested position
- One of the professional jurors, also practicing as a county planning

official, thinks realistically about the process and results, but remains free from the internal logic of the county

- The independent juror, by contrast, focuses entirely on the entries, their architectural and urban qualities, and he is obviously independent from the local setting and reasoning, while I see my own position as integrated within the wider local community and its public<sup>3</sup>
- The local county's officials and politicians will have to defend the selected winner and the choice
- The result of the competition will have an impact on two very different communities and in different ways:
  - On the local level and on local discourses
  - On the professional discourse among architects

- 3 My own perspective can hardly be seen as disinterested, as I started thinking about the public reception in the wider local community during the meeting, in which I, too, have a position. I realized that there might be reactions from the local community and this might have some influence on my position and certainly on that of the local lay jurors.

### The third jury meeting, 2009

At the previous meeting the chairperson concluded that the aim is to select a winning entry at the next meeting. This meeting began at 8.30 AM at the county hall. Nearly all jurors attended; missing were some of the lay jurors who had not attended any of the previous meetings, either (Vesänen, 2009c). I noted more than 50 points of view expressed at this meeting, not counting all short comments and confirmations or the rephrasing of previous statements. The discussion was about the need for parking space, a dense urban structure, and the new big issue in the media at this time, namely measures to stop global warming. It was agreed that the topics of a more dense urban structure and environmental concerns are part of the competition brief and thus must be considered in the assessment. It is also agreed that there must be housing in the centre, paying for the potential commercial services. According to the chairperson, there is a need for public life in Smedsby, with pubs, etc. (Östman, 2009c).

In the initial assessment of all entries *By och mur* was assessed as destroying the historical structure. The scale, the green areas and the public squares are sympathetic, but in total it was rated negatively and as unrealistic. One of the professional jurors concluded that «the understanding of space is good but the understanding of the local characteristics is bad». One of the lay jurors concluded: «We want more village» (by in Swedish) «but less wall» (mur in Swedish)» (Östman, 2009c).

Regarding the next entry, *Smide*, the independent juror stated that it was one of the best seen as a whole; it concentrates the built structures, narrows the streets and creates a small town image, but it is clumsy in its architecture and scale. Still, he saw many details that can be used in the later planning process (Östman, 2009c). Most jurors expressed positive feelings towards it, but none were willing to accept the central blocks as they are drawn in the proposal. One of the professional jurors pointed out that much of the proposed structures can be erected without demolishing existing buildings (Ibid.). Another pointed out that it would

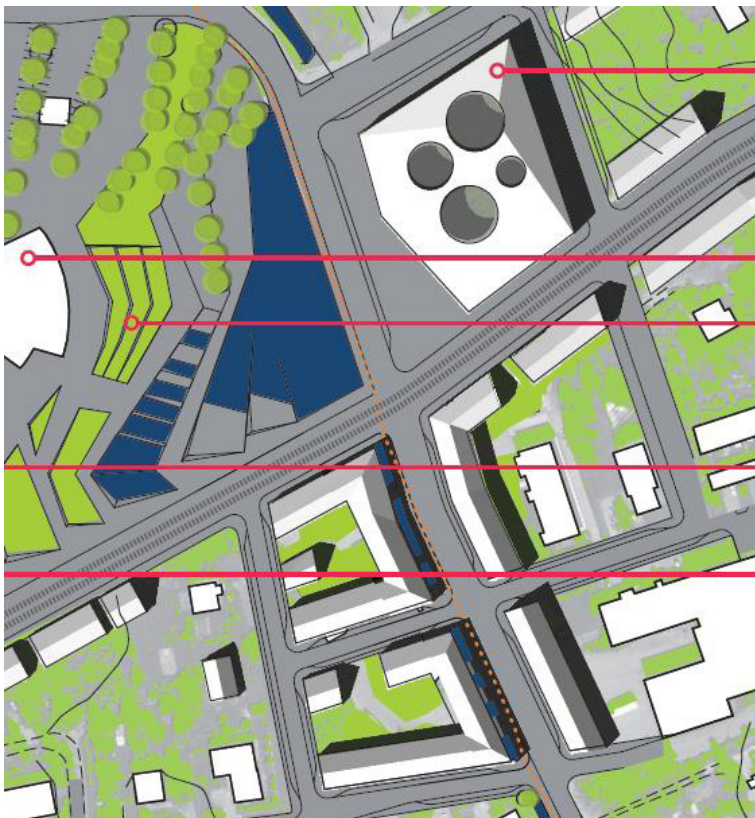
be easy to add new buildings along the *Källängsvägen* road according to this plan. It was concluded that this entry shows a friendly face towards the neighbouring town, but that the access from the north is not resolved (Ibid.). The discussion continued. Everyone waited. No one openly stated that he had selected a winner. Partly, I think this was due to the fact that there was no obvious winner and partly because nobody wanted to make a fool of himself compared to the authority of the independent juror's assessment.

In the entry *Trädgårdsbyn* there is no solution to the more peripheral parts of the competition area, but according to the independent juror it does, however, show a sense of style and an understanding of what is important in this situation, i.e. the market square area. The conclusion was that this entry is acceptable. Yet, one of the professional jurors asked rhetorically whether this entry really fulfils the requirements given in the brief; «it meets the requirements for a detailed plan for the very centre but cannot function as a basis for a master plan for the competition area» (Östman, 2009c). One of the seldom attending lay jurors expressed the worry that there might be a change in building permit policies, currently allowing builders fast procedures and very little official control regarding architectural design. He also disagreed with the architecture presented in the drawings (Ibid.).

According to the independent juror *Transekter* has the smallest number of weaknesses, is realistic and displays a high-class architecture. He then openly proposed that this entry should be the sole winner. He wanted only one winner and only this entry. His argumentation was that Smedsby would thus gain something urban (Östman, 2009c). My personal reflection was that this increased urbanity might be a very strange idea to most local inhabitants (Ibid.). The independent juror pointed out the weakness he saw in the solution; that one can drive straight through the centre, which makes the solution weaker, and it does not strengthen the «genius loci» of Smedsby (Ibid.). The entry had been developed far enough, according to another professional juror; the scale is appropriate and includes a lot of small but nice detailing. The entry can also be implemented immediately, step by step (Ibid.). This was a conclusion some of us found difficult to agree with, especially among the lay jurors, but they were willing to re-evaluate their point of view in response to the interpretations of the two architects (Ibid.). The planning engineer stated that, depending on how the ideas are implemented, it would either improve the centre or destroy it. Regarding the *Källängsvägen* road, he saw potential for its implementation (Ibid.). The meeting ended without a winner finally being chosen. A winner would have to be chosen at the meeting the following week.



Drawing 8. A street view in the entry *Transekt* giving an impression of its architecture.



Drawing 9. Part of the presentation for *Transekt* showing the solution for Källängsvägen road.

My conclusions from the meeting were as follows (Östman, 2009c):

- The county administration has a rather weak position in negotiations with developers and contractors regarding Smedsby, compared to bigger centres. It is not sufficiently attractive and currently two commercial premises in the centre are empty. This is part of the realism the planning engineer is used to and distinctively different from the architects' ideal of reining developer interests into producing high quality architecture and town planning.

- The county has a need for plots that are easy to sell, to attract contractors and development. Without this the community will suffer from a lack of development and dynamism, because almost all developmental steps are to be private enterprises investing money in the centre and hoping for some kind of return on their investment. Any greater obstacle in a centre with an already weak attraction will make the investment look unattractive.
- I trace the danger of missing the intentions of the competition;
  - among the politicians there is no clear support for continuing the design process after the competition, despite the idea of selecting a winner as a form of commissioning
  - if there are two winners, as the independent juror pointed out (Östman, 2009c), there is a greater risk that any follow-up planning process will derail from the ideas of the jury but less risk if there is no follow-up at all during the next few years.

### The final jury meeting, August 14, 2009

The discussions at the final meeting were about the ambiguous situation, with no clear acceptance of *Transekte* as the winner, and about how to proceed, including formal procedures and the writing of the assessment report. At this meeting I noted 60 distinct points of view (Östman, 2009d). Nobody used their written statements and it was basically a debate. The jurors had their written statements at hand yet did rely on them. The assessments were clearly constructed on the spot, on the basis of the debate and especially the statements made by the independent juror. The argumentation was now more distinct. It was now obvious that two of the lay jurors and I as a professional juror favoured *Smide*, but there was no strong antagonism between these different assessments. One argument put forward by one of the lay jurors was that he had hoped for a more ingenious proposal, which was missing in *Transekte*, this later forcing him to propose a second winner (Ibid.). The independent juror countered by asking what is left of *Smide*'s proposal for the market square if the proposed demolition is not pulled through. He emphasized a holistic interpretation, saying that *Transekte* was a more mature proposal and that he wanted to select only one winner, even if he admitted that *Transekte* is not a clear winner (Ibid.). One of the most active lay jurors admitted that he now could see the advantages of *Transekte*, despite his previous rejection of it, but he would prefer to toss a coin if only one winner must be selected (Ibid.). After this, one of the professional jurors supported the independent juror, saying that he sees *Transekte* as holding potential for development (Ibid.). Without any further expression of disagreement, two entries were selected as joint winners of the competition. I think the chairperson was partly and indirectly responsible for the outcome. She often remained rather neutral in the discussions,<sup>4</sup> supported the reliance on professional jurors, but also controlled the jury process with skilful diplomacy, finally persuading the jury to accept the previously unwanted solution of two joint winners.

4 The chairperson saw her task as one of mediating interests without promoting her own opinions (Interview: Lillas, November 5, 2011)

Finally, the meeting agreed that the independent juror would write the assessment report and distribute it to all the professional jurors and the chairperson for review and comments (Vesanen, 2009d; Östman, 2009d).

## Post-jury stage

### Publication September 2, 2009

The independent juror wrote the assessment report but did not distribute it for review (Kjisik, 2009). Nevertheless, he made a careful presentation of the dilemmas and diverging opinions in the jury, and no assessments were singled out as wrong or misplaced. Rather, he presented them as part of the jury's reflective process (Kjisik, 2009; Korsholm kommun, 2009c). Despite the local jurors expecting an animated reception in the media and among the public, there were only four comments posted on the competition website; one discussing a small plot not noted in the proposals and the rest were irrelevant to the competition process.

### After publication

I think the jury process can be seen as ending here, but as it was an open question whether the county would proceed with the results and as the realization of the competition is a central issue – as is the implementation of the jury's decision – I think it is necessary to add something about the later stages of the process. The indecisiveness might have triggered a rejection of the jury's decision, and the obvious lack of political determination to proceed with the results was very obvious in the jury with only one of the officials clearly supporting the idea, whereas leading politicians obviously knew that there was not yet any given political legitimacy for a planning commission after the competition was finished (Östman, 2009c). Half a year after the completion of the competition there was no public sign of further development regarding a commission nor, as it was discussed in the jury, a need to allow the two winners to develop their entries (Östman, 2009d). However, later on the process continued with a minor commission where both winners reworked their proposals, leading to a more mature result (Chairperson, 2011; Sjö White and WSP, 2011). The reworking is split into three different areas, the core centre, the Källängsvägen road and the Äppeldalen housing area. The final follow-up report includes adjustments of the building masses and the traffic arrangements around the market square and a combination of the good solutions for the peripheral competition areas.





Drawing 10. Plan for the centre area according to the follow-up commissions (Sito, White and WSP, 2011).



Drawing 11. Illustration of street view from follow-up commission report (Sito, White and WSP, 2011).

One year after the publication of the competition results, I asked all professional jurors and the most active lay jurors for their comments on this case report (initially written in Swedish) and also for individual interviews. One of the lay jurors answered by e-mail saying that he saw the lack of public comments as an expression of the public passivity in Smedsby and that he sees nothing to criticize in this case report. He also saw the jury process as a necessary and educative process, providing the county with a good basis for further development (Lay juror A, 2010). None of the jurors I later interviewed wanted to add or correct anything in the report. One comment was that this is idealism and it will take 30 to 40 years before it is realized, and that it is important as an image-building process for the centre, but that there are doubts whether the realization will be successful, pointing out that there are strong powers that will try to implement their own projects regardless of this competition result (Planning engineer, 2010). The chairperson, who has followed the process

from the beginning, still has doubts whether they really got the most innovative architects through the selection process (Interview, June 16, 2010) – a scepticism to which the independent juror had an answer already during the jury process, telling me that he could have picked out some more competent architects from the initial list of interested architects (Independent juror, 2010). The professional juror with experience of competitions stated that the most important result is that the process of change has been started, but that an invited competition suits architecture better than urban planning projects. He sees this kind of process as an essential part of a democratic process, with the entries and the process itself providing transparency and competence within a complex and difficult design and decision-making process (Independent juror, 2010).

### Analysis and conclusions

The case study illustrates the dilemma of democratic processes in urban planning (Kazemian, Rönn and Svensson 2007, p. 163). This is by no means a democratic process of free and equal men. There is an inequality present based on professional competence, and overshadowed by various external interests and influences. The citizens of Smedsby are hardly involved, only represented, and would hardly see the architecture in the illustrations as their own, with one of the lay jurors expressing at one meeting his aversion against *Transekt* as «too Stalinist» (Östman, 2009c). There is an asymmetry between professional services and democratic aims, which cannot easily be replaced in this process. A greater democratic influence might reduce the input from the professionals and this complex and difficult urban context asks for professional help. With reference to Dewey's views on the political process (2009) and a comment in an interview by one of the professional jurors (Professional Juror A, 2010), the competition can be seen as a contribution to the public discourse. According to Dewey, democracy is not only about decision making and representatives, but also about an open dialogue (Dewey, 2009; Englund, 2009), and the task of the urban planning administration is thus to promote this kind of dialogue, where the professional analysis and proposals must be used and communicated to the public.

### Analysis

The task of the jury is to select a winning proposal, pointing out the best solution for the client in accordance with the programme and entries, while simultaneously indicating that the winning architect is a good designer (Kazemian, Rönn and Svensson, 2007, p. 129f). According to Lipstadt (2010), the competition is a situation where the architects, who are normally dominated by clients, can momentarily escape this constricting situation and are allowed to design freed from limitations from the dominating client. According to her Bourdieusian frame of reference, it is also important to make a clear break (rupture) (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 207; Lipstadt, 2010) with the professional idealism inherent in the matter of competitions. In Lipstadt's case this means that competitions are not

the format for grand and innovative design but an established tool with certain regularities (Lipstadt, 2010). She also expands the concept of the field from the sole professional community to include all participants (clients and consumers), accepting the production and its sub-processes as real (Ibid), an «illusin» in Bourdieu's vocabulary (1996). In this perspective, the jury process constitutes such a sub-process where the professionals interact with the clients and the representatives of the public. The competitors are liberated from this interaction, which is replaced by the competition brief. They are free to design within the frame it offers and are granted an assessment by peers, at least to some degree. It is true of the Smedsby competition that it did not produce any grand or innovative schemes, though one can argue that, given the complexity and difficulty of its particular urban situation, the solutions do indicate excellence regarding problem solving and professional practice. It is only that this does not result in any remarkable architectural solution. One could claim, as indeed one of the professional jurors did, that the regular format of competitions brings together a good selection of competence with a better capability to solve design problems (IProfessional juror A, 2010). In this case, the value for the winners is found mainly in the pure fact of winning the competition, and not so much in a reputation based on progressive architecture or on striking innovative images.

Lipstadt (2010) makes a point about the need to create a rupture in architectural research in order to avoid any affirmative relationship. This she wants to achieve by thinking of competitions as actions within a cultural field, putting an emphasis on position taking, conflicting interests and ways of fighting for better positions (Ibid.). Looking at the jury work from this perspective, it is clear that there is a battle going on, and that lay jurors hold a much weaker position, some of them not attending the jury meeting at all. I think the battle in the jury is primarily about reputation as competent critics of the subject of urban development. The risk is losing one's position; when put forward strongly and in conflict with the jury consensus it will come across as naïve and even incompetent. The response to risk is the obvious waiting attitude within the jury, described as normal in the interviews of experienced jurors (Kazemian, Rönn and Svensson, 2007, p. 143), and an organizational learning attitude, which must be combined with a swift rejection of earlier personal interpretations that have proven invalid in the jury process. In the sense of a Bourdieusian field theory, the jury process clearly functions as a confirmation of the architect's professional role, with a strong reliance on the independent juror's assessments. It is also clear that different jurors adhere to different interest groups, with the planning engineer tied to his position, one politically appointed juror defending a slack building permit policy, but also the independent juror defending the business interests of the profession and the follow-up commission. It is also obvious that there are important stakes involved in the competition, as almost all lay jurors hold leading political positions, and according to the chair-

person all those invited to be members of the jury accepted without hesitancy (Chairperson, 2011). Due to the minimal cost compensation, they must also be seen as an investment in symbolic values and not economic interests. None of the jurors had property developer connections.

## Conclusions

I think the case study indicates the following:

- The core requirements of the competition brief are important and cannot be neglected in the jury process, because the legitimacy of the assessment rests on the brief.
- It is clearly a cooperative process with a clear hierarchy where the number or majority of lay jurors is of little importance, but also that the professional jurors were not fully in charge.
- The conclusions emerged from the programme, material, individual interpretations and discussions, and they converged in a conclusion about what is possible and desirable in this concrete urban case.
- A competition process with no follow-up commission would have left the county empty-handed, as 15.000 € and the potential for a contract and some good-will is not much compensation to trigger a comprehensive study and concept for the redevelopment of a centre from the invited big architects' offices, where the format of the ideas competition is mainly a search for alternatives rather than a deep analysis.
- The value of an indecisive conclusion with two winners promoted a second round of analysis and argumentation which was beneficial for the learning process of the jurors as well as for the follow-up design process, putting two competing firms together on the same subject.
- The jury process offered a supportive environment for learning and the informal construction of assessments, with no detailed protocol, allowing an easy escape from previous positions. The stakes (regarding reputation) were low, compared, for example, to a competition for an architectural centrepiece with several renowned architects in the jury.
- There is a lack of determination between the experiences demonstrated by the design qualities in the drawings and the conceptual articulation used in the jury in the creation of a shared argumentation and reasoning explaining why one entry is seen as the winner. The value and the qualities still reside in the drawings, but the jurors and the jury make use of concepts and construct a public reasoning to convince the public of the value of the conclusions.<sup>5</sup>
- The basic value of this research enterprise has been the articulation of a jury process and making it public. It provides a rare revelation and an important contribution within the profession and within society generally. One important result was that there was a genuine dialogue about urban qualities and development, between the pro-

5 Rorty (2003) criticized the idea of truthful descriptions, claiming that there is no way we can construct or verify a reliable direct connection between concepts and real qualities. We always have to use the language as a mediating tool, thus disconnecting the material quality from any attempt to describe qualities truthfully.

professionals and the representatives of the county. The case study can also function in case-study-based teaching, promoting reflection about professional values in relation to society among students of architecture. Due to the decision to choose two joint-winners, it is also valuable as an indication of a potential inherent in a situation with two antagonist parties defending their interpretations and solutions. I also would stress the important epistemological or methodological aspect regarding the field theoretical approach, claiming that this case study and the following analysis confirms the importance of seeing the architectural practices in a wider context of culture, with competing interests influencing the architectural profession and its internal hierarchies and changes within it. The architects did not act as disinterested or unselfish agents defending only public interests, but participated with private and professional interests. The present case study functions as a verifying test of Lipstadt's ideas (2010), asking for a rupture in relation to the professional subject in architectural research.

As regards proposals for further research, I see a definitive need to study the preparatory selection and tendering processes, and perhaps also a need for a methodological development concerning commissioning competition projects within the current large European market with large numbers of interested architects. Of particular interest was the contrast between the idealistic understanding of architects concerning their own competence – seeing themselves as competent for any design project – and the realistic attitude of the committee selecting architects for the invitation, which was clearly looking for some kind of specialist competence for this kind of specific urban planning project. It is also clear that we need more studies of jury processes, as this type is very different from one focusing on prestige architecture, or a similar project with more controversial elements embedded. Furthermore, and related to the idea of architecture as representing the public, it would be important to study jury processes from the perspective of lay jurors, too.

The solution in Smedsby of selecting two joint winners seems successful, though in an architectural competition I think most architects would reject the idea of trying to combine two solutions into one final solution. However, in complex planning projects concerning changes in the existing structures this seems acceptable, and in this case that solution provided much more value for money, and supported the idea of follow-up commissions as important for the real outcome of a competition.

Finally, the field-oriented study also indicates the danger embedded in the selection practices for independent jurors, where the jury system can develop into a self-supporting system of certain ideas, because the independent jurors are selected from among previous winners. It thus creates a small group of architects acting as independent jurors and

trained in the same jury and competition tradition but who also have a decisive power in the competition juries. I think this can be seen as an appropriate system for development within the profession and a tool for promoting high-quality architecture, but at the same time the system must be kept open for radical input and a questioning of established values of this limited group of architects. This, I assume, is less of a possibility in invited competitions as the invited architects select the independent juror, and presumably avoid selecting an independent juror known to question their architecture.

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