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## **NORDIC ARCHITECTURAL RESEARCH – EDITORS' NOTES**

**ANNI VARTOLA, MADELEINE GRANVIK AND  
CLAUS BECH-DANIELSEN**

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The launch of this issue of the *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* marks a somewhat pivotal moment in the field of architectural research. To begin with, the current issue is the first that has been conducted by three co-editors-in-chief. The broadening of the base for Nordic collaboration – the current editorial team being Madeleine Granvik from Sweden, Claus Bech-Danielssen from Denmark and Anni Vartola from Finland – hopefully reflects in the contents already now. As the most valuable asset of the *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* is its multidisciplinary and unprejudiced publication policy combined with adhering to the most highly esteemed scientific practices, we are happy to bring forward an issue that celebrates the vibrant and multidimensional research activity that is being carried out in the Nordic countries.

The expanded scope of architectural research may be an indication of the success of long-term governmental policies and an increase in institutional input. In Finland, for instance, the national architectural policy stated already in 1998 to have one of its key targets in promoting innovation through architectural education and research especially in the fields of building heritage, energy saving and R&D in design. Although the financial resources of many architectural institutions have become scarce, we can nevertheless witness the rise of a new generation of architects and planners that regard research and design not as antithetical, but as mutually complementary and rather natural and uncomplicated components of their practice.

In Denmark the same trend is also seen. It happens for instance as a result of a successful 'industrial PhD programme'. In this governmental program private companies can get financial support to implement a PhD-study in close cooperation with a research institution. More and more architecture companies have taken advantage of this program, and thus a new type of PhD-students – that are closely associated with the architectural practice – has been hatched. At the same time, the industrial PhD studies have had another important effect: The concerned

architecture companies have opened up their eyes to the importance and the opportunities of research.

In Sweden four out of nine schools in indoor design, architecture, landscape architecture and planning organized a common platform called Swedish Schools of Architecture, SSA, in 2009. One main purpose was to promote PhD courses. The other strategic objective was to meet, control and coordinate forthcoming research demands from The Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning, FORMAS. In 2010 the national research board announced a call for a strong research environment in architectural theory and method. This call was an attempt to overcome a negative trend with declaiming positions at SSA and less research in architecture and urban design. In order to become a strong research environment, the schools of architecture at Lund, Gothenburg, Stockholm and Umeå have collaborated in the development of two major research programs, *Architecture in the Making* and *Architecture in effect*, both financed by FORMAS. The SSA has also established a national research school as a response to the task of becoming a strong research environment.

We can see two trends. On one hand a need for research in the design field driven by new multidisciplinary challenges for design professions in a knowledge based society. On the other hand, the increased competition for resources has forced many of the Nordic architectural schools and institutions to do determined development work and to sharpen their research policies. It is clear that all resolute actions to increase scientific debate, to keep track of academic interests and to provide systematic opportunities to benchmark individual research for senior researchers and PhD students alike serve as exemplary models to raise the quality of research and to clarify its meaning to the discipline at large.

If the selection of certain focus areas starts to clash with the ideal of academic freedom, however, we will be faced by the double-edged sword of benefit versus utility. In the area of research, one should always remember that there is no such thing as a free lunch. As architecture is, today perhaps more than ever, tied with building industry, technological advancement, media attention, politics, and money, we need to be careful in determining to what extent we let architectural research to follow any commercial interests and to what extent we reserve the word 'research' to include scientific inquiries that do not paint flashy visions or promise quick returns, but promote critical thinking that is useful only in the long run and in retrospect. The editorial team is convinced that despite the variety of the topics and the hands-on approach, all the articles included in this issue are tokens of the latter strategy.

Perhaps the ability to be simultaneously pragmatic and idealistic is fundamentally the greatest and most sustainable virtue of Nordic

architectural research. Indeed, this issue of *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* presents a wide range of research, dealing with architectural problems on a different scale and character.

In the first article, *Gareth Griffiths* speaks from the educator's point-of-view. He puts us face to face with our preoccupations about teaching future architects. He reminds us of the fact that a design studio is not only a platform for practising design techniques, but it is also an arena to practise how to act and think like an architect. Undertaken at Tampere University of Technology, Finland, Griffiths's experimental studio project follows Christopher Alexander's well-known work from the 1970's and shows the importance of addressing the self-image of an architectural student and how every educational situation also bears far-reaching ideological dimensions. If we are to tackle the increasing intricacy of design tasks and navigate through the interaction between myriad of agents involved, we may have to let go of the modernist ideal of the architect as the mighty controller.

*Askild H Nilsen* and *Inger Lise Saglie* have been studying landscape architects' experiences when planning for kindergartens in Norway. Focus in their article is on the role of landscape architects in the planning process and their views on their own contribution, as well as regarding legal confinements. The study shows that the landscape architects are child-centred and motivated to perform planning and building management on behalf of the children. But the actual results at kindergartens are focused less on designated space for play and child-centred philosophies than on trivial functional requirements like parking and universal design. The reason for this is that some functions in kindergarten planning are required by law and strict guidelines, while outdoor play areas are not protected in the same way.

Architecture can also be approached by means of philosophical investigation. *Michael Jasper's* fine-tuned discourse on the interpretation of history in Peter Eisenman's theoretical work challenges our understanding of the methods of making theories. Jasper leads us in front of the postmodern notion that history is not a neutral resource of architecture of the past, but rather, a never-ending project of giving interpretations and composing narratives. When set in a conceptual framework, an architectural object is no longer a constant, objective entity, but transforms into a nest of relationships the readings of which all open up boundless interpretative possibilities.

*Hans Kiiib* and *Gitte Marling* have analysed 'Roskilde Festival' as a temporary city. Referring to empirical studies in the week-long festival on music the two researchers address the research questions: What kind of city life and social experiments are taking place in a temporary city, and how can it be characterized? They focus on the relation between city life, urban design and the aesthetics of architecture and urban spaces in order to discuss in what way architecture and urban scenography are



used as tools to support the goal of an experimental and social engaged city environment? The analysis shows, that the life at the instant city – Roskilde Festival – can be characterized by being ‘open minded’, ‘playful’ and ‘inclusive’, but also by ‘a culture of laughter’ that penetrates the aesthetics and the urban scenography.

The article by *Valinka Suenson* is positioned within three different disciplines: architecture, sociology, and technology. It has focus on Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory (ANT) as a theoretical framework when applying technological devices in an urban space analysis. The main objective of the theory is to reveal the emergence of a network between heterogeneous actors constitutive for our everyday life and activities. This is applied on the use of RFID technology (Radio Frequency Identification) in the study of the everyday life in indoor public spaces, which the author states can challenge the usual understanding of urban planning.

In the following article *Solvår Wågø* and *Eli Støa* present the results of a study on low-energy housing in Norway. They focus on qualities such as daylight, fresh air and view, as they investigate how these qualities are dealt with in selected new energy-efficient housing projects in Norway. The article is based on interviews with architects at nine Norwegian offices and empirical studies on six low-energy housing projects representing different technologies and design principles. On this background the article discusses whether there is a conflict between architectural qualities and energy efficiency.

The rapidly evolving image of the contemporary architect is beautifully completed by *Toni Österlund’s* innovative article on algorithmic design. Ever since late 1990’s, the data-based computational design strategies have been discussed as a method to master increasing design complexity and to give us more accurate tools to control user-environment interaction. In Österlund’s research, the focus is communally beneficial and functional: adaptive urban lighting. Together with his research team at University of Oulu, Department of Architecture, Österlund discusses practical design tools and technologies that suggest fascinating prospects for creative lighting design.

The seven articles present an interesting range of current architectural research in the Nordic countries. We look forward to receiving more articles in order to continue, and we can announce that a theme issue on *Green Infrastructure* is in the pipeline and will be published in December 2013.

4<sup>th</sup> November 2013

Anni Vartola, Madeleine Granvik and Claus Bech-Danielsen