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EDITORS' NOTES

CLAUS BECH-DANIELSEN, MADELEINE GRANVIK AND ANNI VARTOLA

This issue of the *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* is released at a turbulent time. The recent appalling events in Paris, escalating national-populist thinking rationalised by the flood of desperate refugees into Europe, and the increasingly alarming news from both the environmental and the fiscal fronts do not evoke optimism.

In Finland the stagnated mood and panicky economic prospects have resulted in austerity measures that translate into big budget cuts in the universities and echo in increasing polemics about useful and useless academic research. During the last few months, for example, the Minister of Finance has repeatedly reproached university professors and docents with being idle sinecures who produce nothing but worthless nonsense. At the same time, the Minister of Economic Affairs has demanded that academic research should be more commercially viable and directly applicable in terms of new products, services and jobs that profit the national economy.

Also in Denmark drastic cuts in research and education have been carried out during the past few months. Despite the fact that the government has claimed that research and education form the basic core for the future growth in Danish society, the parliament has just decided to cut 1.4 billion DKK from next year's research budget, and the Danish universities must reduce their total budgets by 2 % per year over the next 3 years. In the field of architecture, the economic cutbacks are even more drastic. The government wants to reduce the number of students by almost 30 % at The Royal Academy of Fine Arts Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation in Copenhagen, and the Aarhus School of Architecture, which translates into 20 % fewer architects in the future.

In Norway and Sweden, the situation is different. The Norwegian government budget for 2016 states that 32.5 billion NOK is earmarked for research and development, which represents 1.01 % of the gross domestic product, and an increase of 2.1 billion from 2015. The Research Council of Norway will therefore have a budget increase of 10 %. In Sweden the new government budget for 2016, presented in September, 2015, proposes to increase total government funding for research and innovation by a total of 940 million SEK in 2016. At the same time, the Swedish government is considering budget cuts, higher taxes and increased government debt in general as a response to present circumstances.

At times like this, we the editors of the *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* find it increasingly important to fly the flag for rigorous research in architecture, academic freedom and international cooperation. It has become increasingly evident that we are only at the dawn of developing applicable research methods and functional academic policies for the scientific community of architectural researchers. The next annual research symposium of the Nordic Association of Architectural Research is titled *The Production of Knowledge in Architecture by PhD Research in the Nordic Countries* and it will be held in Stockholm in May 2016. We believe that architectural research is about to embark on a new renaissance that will evidently benefit those progressively thinking architects and planners who are keen to renew their design methods and base their decision-making procedures on scientifically valid new knowledge, instead of myths, beliefs or professional traditions.

It is towards such a purpose that this issue of the journal publishes five new research findings. **Christina Bodin Danielsson** from Sweden has studied employees' perception of their workplace. Her findings confirm that office architecture is not just a matter of interior design or the number of cubicles per square metre, but forms a subconsciously operative background for very complex environmental dynamics. **Tiina Merikoski** and **Susa Eräranta** from Finland discuss one of the most appreciated means to ensure architectural quality, architectural competitions. In their case-study, Merikoski and Eräranta argue that a too detailed and ambitious competition programme may jeopardise the original, noble aims and produce uninventive entries that are based on biased values and outdated information.

The pragmatically oriented papers by **Bodin Danielsson**, **Merikoski** and **Eräranta** are complemented by new findings from history, theory and architectural research as a discipline. **Sisse Tanderup** from Denmark focuses on the Italian *art of memory* since the 18th century, with special reference to design and architecture. By introducing design by Alessi and Babetto, she discusses how memory and forgetting can be enfolded by poetic narratives in design. Tanderup argues that Alessi and Babetto see poetry and memory as important components in their design process.

Johan Liekens from Belgium discusses design-based research by reflecting on a number of concrete cases. He states that design-based researchers must adopt a critical and questioning negotiation. According to Liekens, design-based research tends to create architectural artifacts that express what the researcher already knows. He concludes that the researcher must be open-minded and study the architectural artifacts as questioning mechanisms – and to wait in suspense for whatever comes into being.

In continuation of this, **Carsten Friberg** from Denmark debates the virtues of research. He argues that sound practice-based research requires that the researcher exercises a certain set of rules that are shared by the members of a specific research community. Thus the virtue of doing research becomes a matter of demonstrating how the researcher masters and follows these rules. Friberg states that architecture has a knowledge tradition of its own, and when this meets research the task is to unite the knowledge tradition with the rules of research rather than importing theories from other disciplines.

The relevance of architectural research is conclusively not judged by opportunistic politicians, but the scientific community that benefits from better methods and theories, and ultimately, the citizens who benefit from homes, workplaces, cities, outdoor areas and infrastructures that are more appropriate, more functional, and more sustainable than before. Excellent architectural research done by first-class researchers with cutting-edge methods at lively academic communities may lack the potential for imminent profit-making, but will have knock-on effects on all levels of our lives.

On behalf of the *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research*,

Claus Bech-Danielsen, Madeleine Granvik and Anni Vartola

December 1, 2015

