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INTRINSIC MISMATCHES WITHIN ARCHITECTURAL COMPETITIONS: CASE SIBBESBORG

TIINA MERIKOSKI AND SUSA ERÄRANTA

Abstract

The architectural competition is an instrument used to investigate possible futures and create knowledge for architectural design and land use planning. In this paper, architectural competitions are discussed as vehicles to finding transformative and effective solutions for planning and building sustainable communities. We argue that the competition as a tool has features that limit its capacity to actually provide solutions for the problems that it is primarily intended to solve.

The paper explores this argument in light of an open international planning competition held in Finland in 2011. The key research questions of this study have been: How did the case study competition proposals perform in terms of the given guidelines and assignment; and, did novel and transformative ideas or solutions emerge?

The results of this study should prove useful to both competition organizers and competitors. They also provide thoughts on how competition practices need to be reformed in order to better respond to the requirements of the 21st century.

Keywords:
architectural competitions, planning tool, sustainable communities, knowledge production, mismatch

1. Introduction

1.1 Architectural competitions

Briefly stated, the architectural competition is a design tool created to investigate possible futures. It is used to imagine how the competition subject, a particular building or a site, might appear if the proposed design were implemented (Andersson, Zettersten and Rönn, 2013, p. 10). More technically, the Architect's Council of Europe, ACE (2014, p. 9) defines architectural competitions as follows:

> *Architectural competition means the procedure of a Design Contest evaluating the ideas of architects, landscape architects and urbanists in a formalised procedure on a defined programme and defined criteria, anonymously weighted by an independent Jury.*

Competitions are widely considered as "one of the best means to provide for quality" (ACE, 2014, p.9) in architecture and planning, and they present a way to demonstrate the skills of the profession. For architects, competitions offer, "design projects that closely resemble commissioned ones" but which come with "a freedom from external limits on creation that is almost identical to that usually granted to the artist" (Lipstadt, 2009, p. 13).

Competitions are seen as a well-established path for architects and planners to gain commissions. They have also become known as a means to draw public attention to a project (e.g. Sudjic, 2006, p.55). More recently, perhaps due to competitions' perceived role as a fair and just way of granting public contracts, they have also become a mandatory element in public procurement methods throughout the EU (Sudjic, 2006). Furthermore, competitions are used in identifying and promoting new ideas in relation to urban planning and design projects, for example in new housing areas and urban renewal projects. Recently the tool has been applied to investigating solutions and creating knowledge for planning land use and communities responding to the known challenges of environmental and climate changes.

Competitions can be defined in two different ways. A competition can be an *ideas competition* or a *project competition*[1]. Furthermore, competitions can be *open* or *invited*. These can be held separately or they can be combined in different ways (ACE, 2014). The difference between an ideas competition and a project competition is that a project competition aims to award one of the prize-winners with a commission whereas an ideas competition aims "to map out possible solutions and to find a broad solution which could serve as a basis for further decisions" (SAFA, 2008, p. 2). An open competition means that it is open to any eligible team to participate. For an invited competition, only teams chosen by the organizer can participate (SAFA, 2008).

1 The term ACE uses is project competition, while SAFA speaks of design competition.

The organizers of the competition are obligated to maintain secrecy for the legal protection of the competitors. Competition entries are submitted anonymously, which means that small and young practices have an equal opportunity to succeed alongside the more established ones. Moreover, the jury processes are closed, as are the processes of preparing the competition documents.[2]

2 Demand for anonymity is regulated at the level of EU through the European Parliament and Council directive 2004/18/EC.

Competition entries are created using the rules and practices of the tradition of architectural knowledge production. The documents, which are required as part of the submissions, include a set of plans, drawings and illustrations that are supported by a written description. Over the years, this set of documents has become a prevailing norm in competitions for what is needed in order to communicate the proposed plan or idea of a building or a new or supplementary community. Or as Svensson (2012, p. 97) has put it, these "representations [...] are used as an instrument of visual rhetoric to mediate the competitor's visions and ideas."

1.2 Finnish urban planning competition tradition

The tradition of architectural and planning competitions in Finland dates back more than a hundred years (Rönn, 2011); the first competition was held in 1876[3] (SAFA, 2015). Competitions have since become a common practice for both municipalities and private investors when seeking solutions for individual building projects, communities and larger scale developments, or to acquire professional services for these projects. Therefore, they have gained a significant role as an urban planning instrument in Finland. Each year, approximately 5 to 10 open competitions and 10 to 30 invitational competitions are organized (SAFA, 2011).

3 The first architectural competition was for the design of the building of the Bank of Finland in 1876. The first planning competition was held in 1899 for the Helsinki district of Töölö (SAFA, 2015).

In Finland, the General Council of the Finnish Association of Architects (SAFA) approves the competition rules[4]. SAFA is also usually invited to partner in arranging the competition, and is responsible for distributing information on competitions as well as for developing their format. The competition rules lead the process of organizing any competition, whereas a competition program, or brief, directs the goals, requested documents, evaluation criteria and other significant information in relation to the competition. The program contains all of the necessary information for the competitors, who are expected to carefully follow the given guidelines.

4 According to SAFA competition rules (2008, p.1) "The criteria for legal protection and the quality criteria set out in [the competition rules document] are recommended for use in architectural competitions in Finland." In open competitions where SAFA is consulted, a contract is made between SAFA and the organizer. In invited competitions the contract includes invited competitors in addition to SAFA and the organizer (SAFA, 2008).

In every competition, a jury is appointed to approve its conditions, answer questions, evaluate entries and decide on the results. The competition rules state that at least one third of the jury members have to be professionals in a relevant field (SAFA, 2008). This typically means that these jury members are architects. In addition, jury members can include representatives from the organizing municipality, decision-makers, other professional experts, clients, and sometimes end-users. The main purpose of the professionals is to act as guides to architectural evalu-

ation for the otherwise mainly lay-members of the jury (Rönn, 2011, p. 101, 109). Nevertheless, representing a professional minority in the jury does not mean their input would have less impact. Instead it can even enhance their position as experts (Rönn, 2001, p. 109).

1.3 Objectives of the paper

This paper discusses planning competitions as vehicles to sustainable communities. The aim is to deepen understanding of design challenges in planning sustainable communities by exploring how the competition proposals for the case study competition responded to the task assigned. Consequently, this paper is interested in the following research questions:

(1) How did the case study competition proposals perform in terms of the given guidelines and assignment?
(2) Did novel and transformative ideas or solutions emerge?

The paper synthesises the results of a case study research, and continues discussion from the point from which the research of Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans (2012) ended. These results have been further analysed, and the design proposals again investigated in relation to the design assignment they were given. Attention is drawn to the competition practicalities and to the guidelines given in the competition program. The findings support the argument that the competition, as a tool, includes features that set limitations and create restrictions on finding viable solutions.

First, this paper will construct the framework for studying architectural competitions in relation to the objectives of this paper. Then, the research methods and the case study will be described. Finally, the main findings of the critical analysis on the case study competition process, documents and proposals will be presented, and the research questions will be answered and discussed. The paper will conclude with some initial considerations on the best approach to begin responding to these findings.

2 Investigating planning competitions

Competitions are used as a tool to investigate a variety of possible futures for a particular site. They allow different options to be studied, and provide stakeholders with hints of what to already expect before the commission (Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012, p. 70), both in terms of the design and in terms of the skills of the design team. Moreover, it is commonly assumed that this process is disinterested. However, Lipstadt (2009) argues that it is precisely these lines of reasoning which represent a commonplace argument, an argument that appears "to a researcher to make good scientific sense" as it has "an equivalent in ordinary sense" (Lipstadt, 2009, p. 14).

As a process not required by law, but which nonetheless has become a common practice, competitions present a tradition that contains these kinds of *beliefs* which make them resistant to "reasonable questioning" (Lipstadt, 2009; Sudjic, 2006). Furthermore, these beliefs themselves seem to be the main obstacles preventing the interrogation that research on architectural competitions aims to carry out (Lipstadt, 2009; Sudjic, 2006). Within the architectural profession, competitions are regarded as "uncomplicatedly good things", and they are "understood as an expression of a disinterested commitment to quality" (Sudjic, 2006, p. 55). Even among the researchers, competitions are associated with producing an innovative solving of design problems. For instance, Adamczyk, et al. (2004) has stated, "architectural competition stimulates the production of innovative proposals for technical and aesthetic solutions for design problems" (p. 2); as if the process or formula of the competition would be sufficient in itself to produce these good quality outcomes.

It seems to have become a characteristic feature of competitions that they "generate exceptional designs" (Lipstadt, 2009, p.12), and that competitions act as "a creative force" (Sudjic, 2006, p. 56). Indeed, we have seen architectural competitions producing some of the most iconic buildings in the world and how competitions have "transformed the nature of architecture" (Sudjic, 2006, p. 56). Nonetheless, as Sudjic (2006, p. 58) recalls, "for every successful architectural competition, there is another that ends in embarrassment or worse."

Nonetheless, new challenges have been posed in the 21st century for planning competitions such as the ever-growing need for multidisciplinarity in design teams, and the requirements for open and communicative planning processes. In the introduction we presented the features of a competition which represent those prevailing practices that are definitive to architectural competitions. Within the architectural profession, these key features are as much appreciated as the competition practice itself. Only recently, mainly due to the demands for multidisciplinary teams, have these characteristics been questioned since they are unfamiliar ways of working and producing knowledge for other professional disciplines. Although efforts have been made to adjust competition practices according to some new demands (for instance, to meet the requirements of public procurement policies), a reluctance remains to change many of the key elements. Lipstadt (1989; 2009) has pointed out how competitions have always been changing "in their composition but not in their structure". Both architectural praxis and architectural education employ competitions in learning, as tools of knowledge production and as sources of inspiration: it is the "professional control" over the competition culture "that is being challenged by new competition forms" (Andersson, Zettersten and Rönn, 2013, p. 10).

Despite the long history of competitions, research into competition processes has remained sparse (Kazemian, Rönn and Svensson, 2006). Recent work has focused mainly on the tradition of organizing architectural competitions (e.g. Kazemian, Rönn and Svensson, 2006), and on evaluating architectural quality or jury processes in Finland and the Nordic countries (e.g. Svensson, 2009; 2012; Rönn, 2011; Östman, 2012). Nevertheless, contemporary research on architectural competitions has recognized the demand for innovation in developing the format, guidelines and practices in competitions as well as the need to study the competition processes (e.g. Östman, 2012). There is also a need for further research focusing on the emergent theme of programming planning competitions that aim to explore solutions for new sustainable communities.

Despite these research interests being recognised, little attention has been paid among competition research on how the key features of competitions (i.e. the elements that comprise a competition) impact on the results (whether they actually produce ideas, plans and designs that are asked for). This paper discusses whether inconsistencies exist between these elements and the outcomes of the competitions. It is argued that the competition instrument itself creates restrictions, therefore ineffectively supporting the discovery of transformative ideas or solutions for future sustainable communities.

2.1 Research method

The main part of the research was accomplished within a competition project: The Sibbesborg Competition for Sustainable Community. The value in a single case study is in the concrete and context-dependent knowledge it provides (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In addition, as Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 229) has discovered, a specific case study, rather than a random sample reveals more information because many actors related to the case are activated and "more basic mechanisms in the situation studied".

The research followed the characteristic steps of an action research process, where (1) knowledge was produced together by the researchers and non-academic actors; (2) the knowledge was applied immediately in practice (as far as it was possible); (3) the application of the knowledge was collectively evaluated during the process; and (4) proposals for further use of the knowledge have been made. (Saija, 2014, p. 191) This said, Saija (2014, 193) has interestingly noted, "action research is not a methodological choice, but an ethical and epistemological one". It aims to generate a collective learning process between the researchers and the other actors (Saija, 2014, p. 187) and to intentionally promote change within a field of knowledge that deals inherently with change, such as planning (Saija, 2014, p. 192).

The Sibbesborg competition project was organised by the municipality of Sipoo in Finland and it was supported, documented and analysed by Aalto University researchers[5]. The data was collected during this project, and the analysis of the competition process was accomplished accordingly (see Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012[6]). Further examination has been executed afterwards by combining the results of the literature review and the competition proposals, and by explicitly comparing the competition documents with the design proposals.

The competition project was divided into two phases: the *planning phase* and *competition phase*. The researchers collaborated with the competition organizers and were members of the organizing team during the planning phase. More precisely this meant that Aalto University was responsible for planning and hosting three workshops at the beginning of the project. These workshops brought together experts and professionals of different fields[7] to discuss how the competition could be formulated. In these workshops both the aims of the competition as well as the form of it were tackled. After providing the results and material from the workshops for use of the competition organizers, the researchers contributed to the general discussion and the formulation of the competition program as members of the organizing team. Nevertheless, at this point the competition secretary's role grew stronger and the researchers shifted increasingly towards their role as observers. All in all, both the researchers and the experts that participated in the project in different ways had no role in the decision-making and acted more as advisors or counsellors to the organisers.

During the competition phase, research shifted to a closed observation, where the researchers followed and observed the evaluation process but did not contribute to the discussion of the proposals. Finally, the whole competition process was analysed by the researchers. The material for the study included documentation of the planning phase (video recordings of the three expert workshops, drafts of the competition program, and the researchers' notes and proceedings of meetings), the competition program with the attached documents, all (30) competition entries, the researchers' personal notes on jury meetings, video recordings of the launching event and the prize ceremony, and transcripts of a total of 11 interviews of key members of the organizing team, including the five experts that were invited to support the jury work.

After the competition was resolved, the competition documents – competition program, proposals and evaluation material – were critically analysed. All these documents were studied with the aim of investigating how the different elements in the competition program – aims, guidelines and requirements – corresponded with each other. More precisely, it was examined how the proposals responded to these guidelines and aims. The researchers sought evidence from the text and/or imagery of

5 The core team at Aalto University involved two researchers as well as a research manager.

6 An assessment report was compiled of the Sibbesborg competition project, which was published in Finnish by Aalto University in 2012 (see Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012).

7 Altogether 21 experts participated in the workshops. These included experts from the fields of land use planning, urban design and architecture, urban studies and urban geography, housing and living area design, urban ecology, eco and energy efficiency, mobility and transportation, environmental psychology, user-centred design, building and construction, project management and development, planning competitions, globalization and urban economics, sustainability and urban development, and real estate business (see Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012).

the proposals that would explicitly respond to a certain aim or requirement.

Furthermore, the researchers assessed the novelty and transformativeness of the proposed solutions by revising the Evaluation minutes (2012) and the transcripts of the interviews, in addition to setting them against selected translations on sustainable development and on the latest knowledge on humanity's influence on the local and global scale environmental and climatic systems (e.g. Barnosky, et al., 2012; Rockström, et al., 2009; Steffen, et al., 2015). Although these had not been part of the guidance of the competition, it seemed reasonable to expect that the latest knowledge on sustainability should be reflected in design proposals created by a team of professionals in one way or another.

The analyses done for this study involved the researchers' interpretations in many places. For instance, analysing the proposals as a researcher does not factually differ from evaluating them as a jury member or an expert providing his or her view. Interpreting a proposal or an idea positively confers upon its potential, while a negative interpretation lessens its credibility (Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012, p. 60).

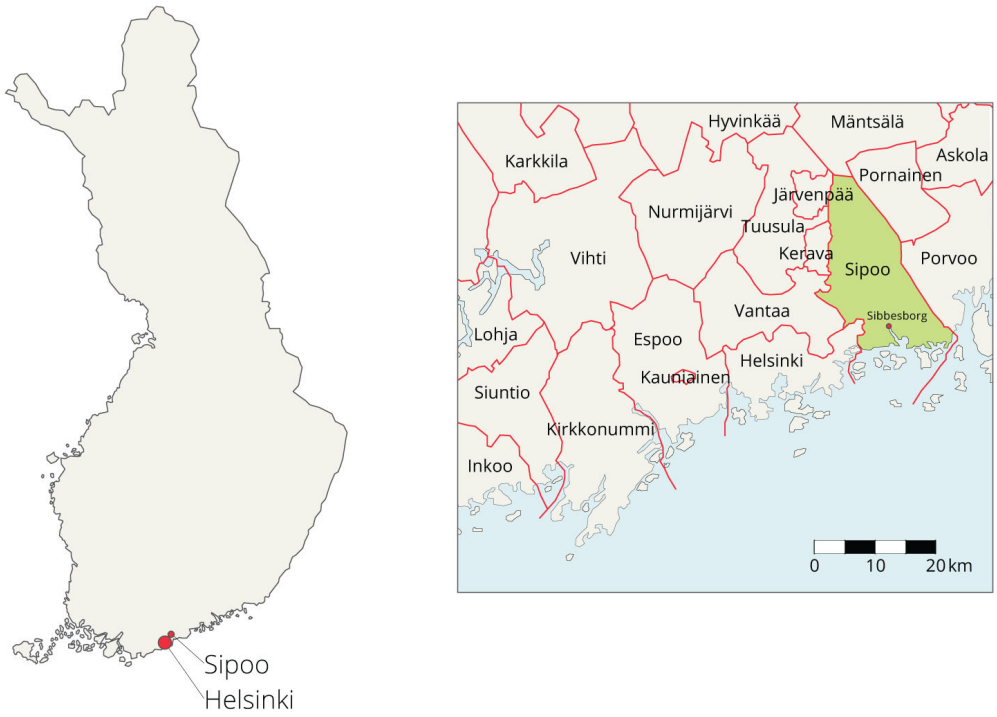
The experts involved in the project were likewise unsure of how much interpretation one can use; for instance, if the text is not supported by the imagery in a proposal (Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012, p. 60). In the researchers' analysis of the proposals, explicit evidence or a piece of knowledge had to be found either in the text or as illustrated in order to be able to say it was included, and interpretation in this sense was minimized. Although aware of these challenges, the researchers have found encouragement in Flyvbjerg's notion that "the most advanced form of understanding is achieved when researchers place themselves within the context being studied" (2006, p. 236).

3. Case study: Sibbesborg competition project

3.1 Case description

In 2011, the municipality of Sipoo in the metropolitan area of Finland (figure 1) held an international, open planning competition to explore the development of a 26 km^2 site (figure 2). Sipoo organized the competition in order to discover a sustainable approach on how to deal with the pressure for growth[8]. The scope of the competition was based on the Sipoo 2025 Master Plan and the municipality's expansion strategy, which aim to respond to the overall development targets for the Helsinki region (Competition program, 2011, p. 4).

8 An example of the growth pressures Sipoo municipality is facing is that in 2009 Helsinki acquired land from Southwestern Sipoo. Since then, Helsinki has been expanding the acquired area by buying adjacent private land. These actions have been widely discussed for instance in the national news (see for example http://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/aihe/ostersundom/).



The competition area is located around the urban district of Söderkulla and the Sipoonlahti area (figures 1 and 2). In the competition, the new town of Sibbesborg was to be based on a future rail connection even though final decisions on it as well as on the form of it (train or metro) had not yet been made by the time the competition was launched. The development of the area was seen as a valuable opportunity, and it was envisioned by the competition organizers that the new town of Sibbesborg could act as a living laboratory for piloting sustainable urban development.

Figure 1
The municipality of Sipoo is located in Southern Finland, next to the capital, Helsinki, in the eastern parts of the metropolitan area.
ILLUSTRATION: TIINA MERIKOSKI; SOURCE: UUDENMAAN LIITTO

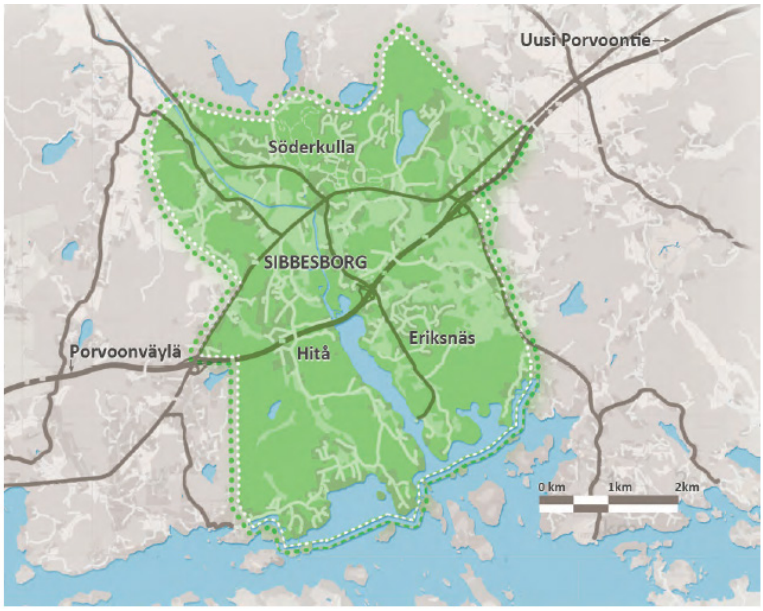


Figure 2
The competition site as it was presented in the competition brief.
SOURCE: COMPETITION PROGRAM (2011)

The competition was programmed in collaboration with Aalto University, and supported by Tekes, the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation, through its Sustainable community 2007–2012 program. It was influenced by many projects and criteria connected with the implementation of sustainability. These included the *Eco-Efficiency Tool for land use planning in Helsinki* (Lahti, et al., 2010) developed by the VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland and the City of Helsinki City Planning Department; and *Sustainable Urban Regions – Criterion and Indicators: Tools to Aid Planning* (Söderman and Saarela, 2011) by the Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE).

The competition was realised with high ambitions in terms of sustainability aims. Thus, a great effort was put into defining the sustainability guidelines for the competition program. In the end, five key themes for sustainability were created and five professionals were recruited accordingly. A common practice regarding use of professional experts in competitions is to ask for their written statements on selected proposals in the very final stages of evaluation. In this competition, the five experts not only created thematic guidelines and evaluation criteria but also evaluated all competition entries accordingly. The challenge of evaluating the proposals in compliance with the themes was very well understood; therefore, substantial weight was applied to acquiring the necessary expertise and knowledge to support jury work.

3.2 Sibbesborg competition project phases

The competition project began in August 2010 with only its key characteristics defined by the organizers. The high aims for sustainability, the competition area's location in the fast growing metropolitan area combined with the precious natural environment, and the exceptionally long temporal range of development, created a need for thinking over the competition process in a completely new way. Therefore, the competition project was divided into two separate stages: the planning phase, and the competition phase.

In the planning phase, the objectives were threefold: First, to create a common understanding of the aims for future Sibbesborg as a sustainable community; second, to outline the competition process; and third, to compile the competition program and evaluation criteria in a transparent and interactive way. To meet these aims, experts of different fields of studies as well as local decision makers and residents were invited to participate in the project in various ways. The planning phase was a flexible and iterative process that was constantly evaluated and adjusted by the organizing team.

An important part of the planning phase was workshops, which were organized to call for fresh ideas and innovative approaches to land use planning, sustainable regional development and competition organiza-

tion. In these workshops, professionals from the field of planning and other disciplines related to sustainable urban development were invited to envision a future sustainable community, and to discuss a new format for a planning competition tailored for sustainable communities – focusing on the Sibbesborg competition in particular. The workshop results were summarized into a vision for Sibbesborg. It was from this vision that the five themes of sustainability were derived. These thematic aims were emphasized in the program and participants were encouraged to form multidisciplinary planning teams accordingly.

The competition phase was launched in a seminar in March 2011, and the competition period was 6.5 months. Altogether, 30 proposals were submitted, one of which was disqualified, as it did not follow the competition rules.[9] The competition jury consisted of the architect members indicated by the Finnish Association for Architects, two invited international jury members, and the representatives of the municipality governance (Competition program, 2011, p. 6). The experts responsible for creating the thematic evaluation criteria assisted the jury in evaluation but were not part of the jury.

9 The disqualified proposal was composed in Finnish language although only submissions in English were allowed (Competition program, 2011, p. 9).

The evaluation was divided into two. First, a working group consisting of the team of experts, the competition secretary, and some of the jury members, prepared the preliminary classification of the submissions. In the latter evaluation phase, the whole jury met to discuss and decide on the final results of the competition. All in all, two jury meetings together with the experts were held before a two-day evaluation seminar where the awarded designs were agreed on. In addition, the proposals were available for public review on the competition website. The Aalto University researchers participated in all of the jury meetings, following and observing the discussion.[10] The Sibbesborg competition was resolved in the evaluation seminar in November 2011, and the winners were announced in January 2012.

10 Only for the final decision on the winners at the end of the evaluation seminar, the researchers were not allowed to stay in.

3.3 Aims of the competition

The Sibbesborg competition program indicated several, extensive aims (table 1). First of all, the competition aimed to "...put forward a plan for a community of up to 70,000–100,000 residents..." and "...to outline the first steps in the extensive implementation process" (Competition program, 2011, p. 4). The competition was intended to help Sipoo planning officials to envision how a new low-carbon town of this size with a living environment that promotes sustainable lifestyles could be implemented in stages.

In terms of sustainability, "the aim of the competition organizers [was] to establish how [the area] should be developed in order to respond to local and international demands of sustainability both now and in the future" (Competition program, 2011, p. 4). In the competition program, it

was also emphasized that "the most important targets […] include the creation of a well-balanced urban structure and a small-scale cityscape" (Competition program, 2011, p. 11). In addition to finding development strategies for the site, the municipality of Sipoo expected to find the best possible partners for the future planning of the competition area (Competition program, 2011, p.11).

Table 1
The aims of the competition (Competition program, 2011, p.11).

1. To examine how the area could be developed in accordance with both local and global sustainability objectives, now and in the future
2. To discover a vision for a sustainable community and a long term overview for the area
3. To submit ideas for a sustainable and controlled implementation process, which would facilitate gradual and flexible development
4. To create a practical plan and means of developing the area into a sustainable new town of up to 70,000–100,000 inhabitants
5. For the area to serve as a pilot project for a sustainable community
6. To identify the best possible partners for future planning and development

An additional aim of the competition project was to investigate new competition practices that would better respond to the needs and challenges of planning communities in the 21st century. Therefore, when the competition project was initiated the formulation of the competition was still largely undefined. This meant that in addition to certain competition practicalities mainly concerning transparency and open communication, the key aims of the competition were created through a process in which the organizers, researchers, invited experts, SAFA and the public participated.

3.4 Competition assignment and documents

Along with the aims, the criteria for the Sibbesborg competition were extensive. Essentially, the assignment was twofold: (1) to envisage the future town of Sibbesborg, its functions, urban structure and cityscape; and (2) to include a description of the stages of implementation required in order to attain this vision (Competition program, 2011, p. 33). These tasks were filled with detailed requirements (table 2) and they overlapped in many parts. In other words, the first part of the assignment focused on creating a future vision, and the second, on the process with which to achieve that vision.

In terms of sustainability, the competition task was divided into five themes in order to clarify the evaluation criteria and to encourage the competitors to form multidisciplinary teams. These five themes were:

- Unique methods of organizing transport
- Unique ways of living and a unique life-styles
- Unique environment and landscape
- Unique forms of eco- and energy efficiency
- Unique methods of organizing employment and services

Table 2
The table presents the competition assignment as it was described in the competition program. In the program, the assignment was divided into two parts: (1) to create a vision for a sustainable Sibbesborg; and (2) to produce a path towards that vision. These assignments overlap and are in many parts identical.
Source: Competition program, 2011, p. 33.

1. Assignment: A vision for a sustainable Sibbesborg	**2. Assignment: A sustainable path towards implementation**
The competition assignment is to design, for the Sibbesborg area, a plan, which will function as the basis for future developments and local master plans, and which…	The competitors must also produce a description of a multi-disciplinary, self-regulating area development process, which will cover the following points…
… Will comprise an overall vision for the future Sibbesborg (a city of 70,000 to 100,000 inhabitants) supplemented by detailed localised solutions, and fulfilling local and global objectives of sustainability	… A sustainable, flexible and interactive process of implementation
… Defines what the role and character of Sibbesborg will be in the future, as the metropolis expands towards the east	… The preliminary steps and the subsequent intermediate stages
… Determines what the centre of Sibbesborg will be like and where it will be situated	… The sequence of implementation and target schedule
… Defines the development solutions at local master plan level and the sustainable principles for the development of Sibbesborg	… The operators and organisations participating in the process
… Will have an urban structure and cityscape well suited to the location, and based on local conditions and values	… The relationship to other regional development processes
… Will be based on high-quality innovative solutions and urban planning	… The changing regional role of the area as the process progresses
… Will ensure the development of Sibbesborg into a unique, pleasant small town, that functions as a part of the overall metropolitan area	… The means of interaction with local residents and other operators within the local community
… Will be based on high-quality pedestrian, cycle and public transport facilities	
… Is technically and financially viable	

The required submission documents were in line with the prevailing practices in planning competitions, and they included:

- Overall plans (scale 1:15,000)
- Relationship of the competition area to the region as a whole (scale 1:250,000)
- Detailed partial plan for the centre
- Written description of the content of the submission

Additionally, a description of the implementation process was required as well as material responding to the five themes of sustainability, but these were not given additional guidelines or directions. The five experts responsible for creating guidelines for each theme were allowed to define what material they expected to be included in the proposals but none of them detailed any specific instructions.

As an environment that is to be developed into a town of 70,000–100,000 inhabitants, the competition site is challenging. The whole of Sipoo currently holds only 19,000 residents, and Sipoonlahti bay area is known for its fragile and pristine natural environment. The area also has a history in farming and the current residents appreciate its traditional cultural landscapes. Considering the existing conditions (figure 3), the challenge meant that the time span for this kind of new development had to be exceptionally long. Competitors were advised to assess the undetermined but clearly extensive time frame of the development. According to the competition program (2011, p.36): "The competition does not define an exact timetable for implementation, as the expansion is expected to take place over a longer period of time. It is essential to recognize the factors that will allow expansion, and to which the expansion should be linked." Even so, it was acknowledged in several occasions that development of the new community would be developed over decades, possibly over a hundred years.

Figure 3
An orthoimage of the competition site where key features of the landscape and existing build environment can be seen.
SOURCE: COMPETITION PROGRAM (2011)

4. Case analysis

The critical analysis of the proposals in relation to the other competition documents revealed that in spite of the perceived success of the competition results[11], the entries did not respond effectively to the key aims of the competition. This was also discussed in the interviews, as the expectations the experts had for the entries had been high. The reasons for these shortcomings are likely manifold, and not all can be found within this material or analyses. For instance, the complicated relationship of the competing design team and the competition organizers (a will to win the competition and the commission balanced against the realism, and the implicit or assumed agendas of the organizers) seems to play a role in this (Merikoski and Junkkonen, 2012). Understanding these complex reasons requires much more investigation and a different approach to the material than this paper presents.

11 The organizers were particularly content with the results, and the awarded proposals were considered well prepared. After the competition, the development of the competition site was undertaken with the prizewinning team. However, in light of the research questions of this paper, a more detailed study into the performance of the proposals reveals that the successfulness of the competition project is more complex.

However, three clear mismatches were identified. Mismatches were found in (1) *competition aims and assignment* and *what can be solved within a single competition*; (2) *within the design assignment*; and (3) between *aims and assignment* and *required documents*.

4.1 The three mismatches found within the competition material

The first mismatch lies in the competition aims and assignment, and what can be realistically solved in a competition. The several highly ambitious aims combined with an assignment that tried to find answers to all of them conflicts with what is realistic to solve in a single competition, and with what is reasonable to ask of the competitors.[12]

12 In an open competition, no reward is provided for the work unless the submitted proposal receives an award. Thus, most competition proposal work is carried out at the participant's own expense.

It seems likely that the detailed comprehensiveness of both the aims as well as the assignment made the key aim of the competition unclear for the competitors (Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012, pp. 45–46). Indeed, it is not clear in the competition program what exactly was the *most important* aim: future vision, development path, practical planning solutions, the (local and global) sustainability objectives or finding the right partners? Moreover, in order to address the various aims of the competition, the program and the required background material ended up being rich in information but overwhelming. It is fair to argue that all of the individual aims and tasks could not be tackled effectively in a single proposal, in a single competition, within the given schedule. Just the task of creating a vision of a sustainable new town for 70,000–100,000 inhabitants projected as far as a hundred years into the future is massive.

For best results, the main question of the competition needs to be stated as clearly as possible, and accordingly supported by the most relevant data. An abundance of additional information does not add value for any of the counterparts – the competitors, the evaluators or the organizers.

Focus should be placed on defining a clear goal and on guiding the competitors into the desired direction rather than trying to solve all problems on all levels. Architect's Council of Europe, ACE (2014, p. 9) instructs in a similar way: "The competition brief must be clear and unambiguous. Competition requirements must be clearly specified. There must be a clear distinction of requirements and non-binding guidelines."

The second mismatch appears within the design assignment: competing teams were asked to produce both a vision *and* a practical town plan. Comparing the aims with the assignment reveals that the exhaustiveness of them was not the only challenge, the foggy relationships between the vision and the details were similarly so, not to mention the global and the local, the large and the small. It appears as if the form of the competition had not been decided: was it an ideas competition or a project competition? The competition held elements from both of these competition forms, and it was not clearly established which one it was. Envisioning far into the future would best fit with the concept of an ideas competition whereas practical plans are typically asked for in project competitions. It is an important distinction since it affects all of the competition documents and the manner in which they are compiled. For instance an ideas competition looking far into the future requires less comprehensive and somewhat different background information than a competition looking for a detailed plan for realization.

Furthermore, it seems unreasonable to ask the design teams to create a practical plan of an urban structure projected far into the future, when the societal, technological, environmental and economic conditions will be very different from current conditions and, in addition, very difficult to imagine without providing any hints on how the gap between now and then should be approached. Consequently, none of the proposals were able to detach themselves from the conditions of today and the past. For instance, all the proposals relied on transportation technologies and methods developed during the past 100 years instead of even trying to imagine how it could become or change in the next 100 years.

The third mismatch concerns the aims and the assignment in relation to the required documents. This mismatch appeared in two ways. First, the aims and the assignment were not effectively supported by the required set of documents. For instance, the long-reaching time frame was not reflected in the required competition documents. Even though the time horizon of the competition reached exceptionally far into the future, a detailed plan for the centre of the new town was unequivocally demanded. Detailed plans support the aim of finding a basis for a design to be realised, but they are not effective in envisioning far into the future especially without considering what else is needed (e.g. documents to imagine societal, environmental and other conditions). Moreover, in the competition program (2011, p. 11), the greatest challenge of the Sibbes-

borg competition was found to be in defining the path that would take the sustainable community from vision to reality. Thus the assignment was also to describe "the stages of implementation" (Competition program, 2011); however this was not demanded as a required document.

In addition, the challenge in finding the best partners among unknown competitors, with which no previous relationship or experience exists, is to discover how the design teams behind the anonymous proposals would address the challenge, and how their way of thinking would help to solve the problem at hand (Sudjic, 2006, p. 65). Thus, it needs to be considered what are the exact documents the organizer, or more precisely the jury, needs in order to evaluate the teams' capacity to fulfil the task, to assess their design thinking in tackling the challenge and to measure their suitability for future co-operation. It begins with considering the format of the competition: Does the anonymity of an open competition support this aim in the correct manner? Would it not be better to test the partnership already during the competition process?

The second way in which the third mismatch presented itself is linked to multidisciplinary cooperation. Sustainable community development calls for a combined effort of different fields of expertise, which in turn poses challenges for the evaluation of proposals. In architectural projects, knowledge is embedded in the imagery, and the "aim is for the images to be self-explanatory" (Andersson, Zettersten and Rönn, 2013, p. 10). Moreover, in architectural competitions, the ways of architectural knowledge production dominate the creation of competition proposals and the communication of the knowledge that has been produced. However, practices in different fields of studies vary and architectural blueprints as well as visualizations are just one form of knowledge production among others. Practitioners of other professions find it difficult to read and understand architectural imagery, as their background, education and professional practices support different traditions of information use. Furthermore, thematic requirements for the documents are hard to imagine since the concept of competitions and their related practices are unfamiliar to the other professions. Meanwhile, the prevailing competition practices do not support the evaluation of these fields of studies from architectural design documents.

In the light of multidisciplinary knowledge production, it should be considered which things can be presented in illustrations, which in written descriptions, and moreover, *what is the relationship between these two modes of presentation*. Different modes represent different conceptions of knowledge: visual modes "transmit experience", whereas text "is intellectual in character, appealing to reason" (Andersson, Zettersten and Rönn, 2013, p. 10); therefore, the information they carry is dissimilar.

Furthermore, as Rönn has ascertained in his research, "architects don't identify winning entries in competitions by research or reading peer-reviewed articles, but by an experience of quality" (2011, p. 106). In architectural evaluation, the architectural quality of a proposal is prioritized, and its technical design and performance remain secondary (Rönn, 2011, p. 113). This way of finding quality in competition proposals may support the aims of a building design competition, but becomes problematic when proposals for sustainable land use and community planning are evaluated. Not only does the architectural tradition in knowledge production set limitations on the solutions that can be presented but it also limits the tools that can be used to evaluate the technological, societal and environmental innovations.

4.2 How did the proposals perform?

In general, the competition entries did not respond effectively to all the key aims of the competition or the high expectations in terms of sustainability. As mentioned before, it is likely that there are many reasons for this, and the mismatches presented above provide only a starting point for further discussion. The exhaustiveness of all the individual aims and tasks must have played a key role in the performance of the proposals. A single proposal simply could not include everything effectively.

All proposed designs were based on prevailing societal conditions and requirements for urban planning and community development, and performed adequately in that sense – many of them were considered textbook-like (Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012, p. 64). Strong statements for sustainability had been expected especially from international teams, yet the proposals did not provoke new thinking (Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012, p. 64) or present anything that could be seen as a transformative interpretation of the future. None of them were able to successfully and credibly reveal that their design was based on the latest knowledge in sustainability (e.g. Barnosky, et al., 2012; Rockström, et al., 2009; Steffen, et al., 2015).

The awarded designs were well and professionally created proposals for the given task, and made efforts to take into account many of the key aims. They responded to the five themes of sustainability in different ways, yet all the proposed ideas and schemes were based on prevailing concepts, practices and technologies. For instance, the winning entry, *Nourish!* was based on a future metro line and "zero-carbon lifestyle". It also proposed "nearly zero energy" buildings and placed high emphasis on local food production and agriculture (figures 4 and 5). Nonetheless, it did not suggest any creative alternatives to conventional practices, for instance in transport or agriculture, and the technologies included were those that are already accessible and in use.

The imagery and renderings of the awarded proposals added little information beyond the structural composition of the design. They also offered very little to the discussion on how a sustainable town in the future is different from the present day urban environment. It seemed that the awarded entries presented sufficient, well-generated compromises, which included elements that the members of the jury could easily comprehend and agree on.

Figure 4
The winning entry Nourish! proposed a zero-carbon lifestyle, which was to be achieved by the dense build environment. Additional information was not provided on how the transformation will be achieved, or what else, in addition to short travel distances between home, work and services, would support this new lifestyle and mind set.
IMAGE: WSP FINLAND

Figure 5
The winning entry had studied typologies for housing blocks. Many of them included solar power technologies and integrated urban farming, both of which were in line with the overall aims of zero-energy and local agriculture.
IMAGE: WSP FINLAND

The competitors had confronted the challenge of identifying the most essential elements in envisioning for such a lengthy time frame: First, the most critical factors that should be prioritized, and secondly, the future social, political and economical conditions, in other words, the future design context. None of the proposals were able to depart from the current conditions and to look ahead, although hardly any of them seriously suggested that conditions would remain as they are for the next hundred years (Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012, p.51).

Proposing a plan not overly dissimilar to existing conditions may also reflect the competitors' aim to succeed in the competition: if the proposal would not meet current requirements of land use and community planning, it might be considered unrealistic and would not receive an award (Merikoski and Junkkonen, 2012; Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012). Furthermore, the competition program did not present anything that would guide the competitors regarding these future conditions, even though it is a fundamental part of envisioning future communities.

5. Conclusions

The architectural competition is a well-established planning and design instrument. In this paper, competitions have been discussed as vehicles to finding transformative and effective solutions for planning and building sustainable communities. We have argued that the competition as a tool is limited in terms of what it might possibly solve. In support of this argument we have presented a case study research of an architectural competition whose aim was to find solutions for a new sustainable community.

In general, the submissions to the case study competition did not respond effectively to the key aims. Even with high aims for sustainability and a long-reaching time frame for the development, imaginative and innovative ideas did not emerge (Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012, p.55), and the latest knowledge in sustainability was not effectively embedded in the proposals. A reason for this could be that by dividing the aims of sustainability into five themes, it directed the attention away from a holistic scenario (Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012, p.48). It was also clear that some proposals included misunderstandings of the aims and the task (Merikoski, Eräranta and Staffans, 2012, p.64).

Three mismatches were identified that are likely to also play a role in the performance of the proposals. Mismatches were found in:

(1) Competition aims and assignment and what can be solved in a competition in the first place
(2) Within the design assignment
(3) Between aims and assignment, and the required documents

In general, the three mismatches cannot be clearly valued one above the other. Their interrelationship is dependent on the form and scale of the competition. The Sibbesborg competition was multi-scalar; consequently, the mismatches were considered equally important.

These results contribute to the argument that the prevailing competition practices include features that limit the tool's capacity to actually provide solutions for the problems that it is intended to solve. This appears mainly in two ways: by focusing on the practices of architectural knowledge production, thereby preventing other fields of studies from performing sufficiently well; and by not effectively supporting long-term envisioning. In addition, the identified mismatches affect not only on the competitors' abilities to respond to the task, but also the results. Menon and Vanderburgh have realized that in the case of contradictions within competitions, "the way in which competitors and/or the jury resolve [them] will be of crucial importance to the result" (Menon and Vanderburgh, 2014, p. 4).

The results of this study should prove useful to both competition organizers and competitors. They also provide thoughts on the manner in which competition practices need to be transformed in order to better respond to the requirements of the 21st century. In the Sibbesborg competition project, the aim to reform competition practices succeeded in presenting a more open and communicative competition process beginning already from the very early steps of planning the competition. On the other hand, it failed to re-think what is needed of the task as well as of the proposals in order for them to effectively match the precise aims.

After such impressive efforts, which included partnerships with a university and a variety of professionals it is fair to ask: Why did it fail in formulating the task, how did it end up being exhausting, overwhelming and practically impossible to solve? Moreover, why was it allowed to become as such? Here, only the research viewpoint can be given, and even that is highly speculative.

First, the role of researchers as well as the experts was to extend support and provide information for the project – neither had any role in decision-making. Since some of the challenges, for instance, the exhaustiveness of the competition program, could be foreseen, it is fair to say that the researchers failed on their part to effectively shift the direction in which the preparations were heading. Perhaps counter-arguments or suggestions were not sufficiently strong or adequately clear in their presentation, while the traditions in organizing an architectural competition were overly dominant.

Secondly, at the time of formulating the competition program and related documents, the experts complied with their sectorial responsibilities. Only afterwards was it noted, that a holistic socio-ecological view should have been explicitly highlighted.

A third reason for the failure lies more in the theme of this paper – there exists a strong belief that with an architectural competition these kinds of problems can be solved. However, this paper has shown its limitations. Planning for future and envisioning cities and communities to come always includes considering the design context, as well as the future societal and environmental conditions, which will be different from the prevailing conditions. In a design competition aiming to envision future living environments, these factors cannot be omitted. Further exploration will be needed in order to determine if it is at all possible to adjust the competition practices accordingly.

This paper reviewed the conventions of an architectural competition but a larger question beyond this exploration remains: Are the practices common in both the competitions and architectural planning sufficiently effective on a wider scale or even suitable for scenario-based plan-

ning? The problem seems to lie beyond competition organization. Long-term and holistic planning of our living environment cannot be steered and done merely by detailed blueprints.

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