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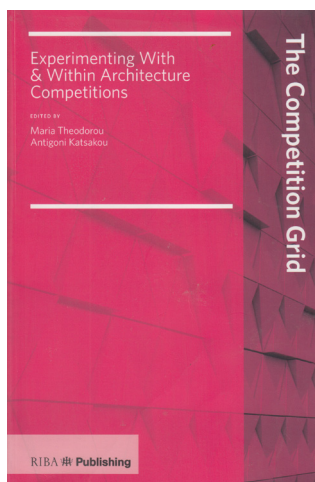
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Photo on the front cover: Magnus Rönn.

The photo show artistic design from an introduction course for students in architecture, called A1, at Chalmers University of Technology.

**BOOK REVIEW:
THE COMPETITION GRID
EXPERIMENTING WITH AND WITHIN
ARCHITECTURE COMPETITIONS
EDITED BY MARIA THEODOROU AND
ANTIGONI KATSAKOU
*RIBA PUBLISHING 2018***

REVIEWER: LEIF D. HOUCK



Architecture competitions can be fair and go strictly by the book, but even then, they may stir up plenty of excitement due to the tasks, the competitors' ambitions, the proposals themselves and the choices of the jury. Architecture competitions have a long tradition, all the way back to the ancient world of the Greeks in fact. It is an interesting field of study due to the many different ways of conducting them, coupled with all the various economic, social, professional and political interests compressed into one such event. Lately there has been some publishing of books on architectural competitions mostly containing scientific articles collected into themes. Such articles may turn out to be fairly tough reading. This book, however, is happily different.

In the introduction the editors start off teasingly with the story of the amazing 1810 competition of the Bedlam "hospital" for the insane, where a 14-year-old is awarded for his design and ideas; one of the juror's students wins, but the juror member himself runs off with the commission. The editors' afterword has a more dry, academic approach explaining that this book "attempts to identify potential avenues for the future development of the competition institution; the objective being to discern the questions that need to be asked, and advance in assessing likely solutions". This may illustrate the character of the book, the interaction between intellectual depth and entertaining read.

The contents are organised into four parts. Each part contains three reader friendly articles by different authors well-known within the field of architectural competition theory. Every section ends with one or more discussions with experienced practitioners. In the first part, “The rules of the game”, Judith Strong looks at the evolution of the UK competition system, while Elisabeth Tostrup investigates contemporary trends. Aymone Nicolas writes about the International Union of Architects and their involvement in international competitions in the period 1948–1974, including the struggle to build trust between the competitors and their clients. Many of the competitions she follows are products of political visions of architecture. Finally, she winds up by asking whether financial considerations have taken precedence over the political vision of architecture. The following interviews focus then on how the system of competitions ought to evolve within the UK and USA; and they allow Paul Crosby (David Chipperfield, Zaha Hadid) and four presidents of RIBA UK and RIBA USA – Jonathan Wimpenny, Tim Clark, Angela Brady and Phil Allsopp – have a say.

Part 2, “Experimenting within architectural competitions” explores the variety of how competitions are conducted, even within EU Directives on public procurement. Kristian Kreiner handles competitions in Denmark, Magnus Rönn deals with experimentation in Sweden while Leentje Volker and Marina Bos-de Vos discuss the Dutch competitions and impact on architects. Kreiner argues that architectural competitions symbolize fundamental democratic values, have given birth to major architectural practices and have had an impact in the forming of a distinct building environment. Sara Grahn (White arkitekter), Stefan Thommen (Gigon & Guyer Architekten), Cindy Walters (Walters & Cohen), Angel Borrego Cubero (known for the film “The Competition”), discuss the role of the competition in their career, experimentation and competition architecture.

In Part 3, “Experimenting with architectural competitions”, Walter Meneth, Birgitte Sauge and Tiina Merikoski deal respectively with the themes E-procurement delivering, BIM and the use of more objective methods for analysing and comparing competitions’ entries. Tom Bloxham (Urban Splash), Cilly Jansen (Architectuur Lokaal), Susanna Sirefman (Dovetail Design Strategists) and Thomas Hoffmann-Kuhnt (wa wettbewerb) contribute in the discussion “experimentation in context”.

Lastly, the contributing authors of Part 4 “Revisiting Architectural competitions’ structures and forms” have in common that they examine past competitions. Jeremy Till raises reasonable and critical questions about the value of architecture competitions like the Helsinki Guggenheim with all of its 1,751 entries, but in the end, no commission. Robert Hammond explains how a public design competition propelled the project High Line in New York, and Florian Kossak dives into Urban regeneration

debates in Kreuzberg, Berlin. Two of the discussions cover city planning and educational structures. The last discussion is labeled “Competitions and genders: A feminist approach”, where the Hi-VIS Feminist Design Collective is interviewed.

The discussions are not necessarily very closely linked to the themes dealt with by the authors in the different parts of the books. But the quality of the contribution of the discussions is that the voices of the practitioners bring more diversity and reflections into the book than the more calm articles alone. And whereas the articles represent explored fields of research, the discussions are able to also bring non-researched themes and opinions to the table. What distinguishes this book is the involvement of an impressively high number of extremely competent, and relevant writers and interviewees within the field of architectural competition, starting out with a well-written preface penned by no other than H el ene Lipstadt. She writes: “Examples of the forces, and their effect in both the past and present are very well described, producing, for this reader, an exhilarating read”. And I agree. This book does not provide a smooth surfaced, linear overview on architectural competition theory. Rather, it is an intellectual “goodie bag” of themes, personalities and knowledge, seeking a diversity of depths.