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EDITORS' NOTES

MAGNUS RÖNN, GERD BLOXHAM ZETTERSTEN

The theme chosen for the present special issue of *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* is Competing in Architecture. For architects competing is of particular interest. This is due not only to the fact that the competition to architects is a way of presenting their work to potential clients, a way of probing their creative ability and impressing their colleagues. It is just as important that competition activity is part of the architects' self image and professional culture and that the competition is supported by their own organization. The architecture competition in its modern form was revitalized in Europe at the end of the 19th century in the wake of industrialisation, while at the same time architects organized themselves as a profession. This is the reason for the special position occupied by competitions among architects. The present-day importance of the competition is demonstrated by the fact that architects' associations employ competition secretaries and at their annual meetings select committees to supervise competition activities. Competition projects are commented on and presented in special journals and on home pages. These are all clear signs of the significance of the competition to the profession. One of the first tasks of the architects' organization was to systematize competing in architecture and urban design. The next task was to get the competition rules accepted by clients as well as their own members. One of the competition forms—the project competition—has been included in the legislation of EU member states through a specific resolution (Directive 2004/18/EC). As a consequence of this regulating activity the competition has acquired a double role, turning into an arena for the development of innovative solutions to design problems as well as becoming a tool for the commissioning of architect services for public projects.

«Architektur ist eine Geste», says Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (1977). He explains, «Nicht jede zweckmässige Bewegung des menschlichen Körpers ist eine Geste. Sowenig, wie jedes zweckmässige Gebäude Architektur [ist]». Architecture is a gesture, but every functional building, adapted to its purpose, is not architecture. For a building to be experienced as architecture certain qualities are required, according to Wittgenstein. Similarly, proposals in architectural competitions may be seen as gestures on the part of the participating architects, gestures that call for a response from jury members, clients and the public. For

the assessment of the proposals, too, there is an apposite citation from Wittgenstein in his *Vermischte Bemerkungen*. He writes: «Der Unterschied zwischen einem guten und einem schlechten Architekten besteht heute darin, dass dieser jeder Versuchung erliegt, während der rechte ihr standhält.» The difference between a good architect and a bad one is today to be seen in the latter's falling for every temptation while the right architect resists it. Wittgenstein advises the members of the jury to reveal the visual rhetoric of the competition proposals while searching for those architectonic qualities that will survive temporary fashions. In this perspective architectonic quality is attributed to proposals that offer up a resistance, communicating genuine values.

The jury's assessment of an architectural project may be understood as a dialogue-based process of gestures and response. In the competition these gestures answer to the design proposals as representations of a possible future. The response is the judgement, the critical examination of solutions that results in a ranking and a written report. Design and architectural critique appear—qua their function—as two key capabilities co-ordinated through the competition. These parts have been cast long ago through the competition rules. With a starting-point in the competition program the competing architects shall identify solid ideas as a basis for the development of a solution to the competition task, and then visualize these proposals for the jury. The role of the jury is to scrutinize the proposals, evaluate their qualities and point to the best overall solution. This is resolved through the practical application of architectural critique.

The fact that design—the creative formulation—and the critical examination are co-ordinated in the competition has a bearing on the production of knowledge through projects. The assessment implies the presence of knowledgeable jury members with a sound judgement who are able to evaluate the proposals, articulate their qualities and deficiencies, compare different solutions and rank them. In the history of critique these qualities as well as keen observation and a differentiating judgement have been active companions. The point that the evaluation of works of art is a cultural construction tied to genus, class, period and politics is a complication, but it does not constitute a hindrance for judges in delivering an evaluative judgement. Architectural critique is a necessity in architectural competitions. Some solutions to the competition task must be pointed out as being better proposals than others. That is the point. Creative intention is integrated within architecture as an academic subject and a professional discipline.

What we see here in the role of the judge is the position of the creative examiner which may be traced back through artistic praxis, with deep historical roots. As early as in ancient Alexandria there were examiners

in *Museion* who evaluated texts for their quality (Forser, 2006).¹ Their task was to single out valuable documents for safe-keeping. These examiners had the fate of the texts in their hands as they were the ones to take the authoritative decision. This was something else than censorship. The purpose of this activity was the identification of a canon of texts that could be recorded and kept as normative assets for coming generations. This saving task in architecture and urban design is that of the architectural historian. And it is the museums of architecture that are commissioned to save in their archives competition programs, competition proposals and jury reports. But it is only in the Finnish competition rules that the museum of architecture has been given such a role.² In the other Nordic countries it is good will, economic resources and accidental circumstances that determine which architectural competitions that get saved for posterity. This is a deeply unsatisfactory situation. The unspecified demand for documentation of architectural competitions is a problem that should be taken far more seriously.

The theory of the architectural competition emerges in the form of rules. As support for this claim we refer to Stephen Toulmin (1953) and Wolfgang Stegmüller (1973) and their positioning within scientific theory.³ According to Stegmüller theory is something that is applied and *gets used*—not hypotheses about reality, the truth value of which is tested in laboratories. Stegmüller points out that rules are valid within a delimited area, a particular domain which is the architectural competition in our case. Both organizers and competing architectural offices are obliged to follow the established set of rules, and it is the jury that must see to it that the rules are followed by the participants. Due to their status as theory the rules have a practical function within this domain as advice during the planning and execution of competition tasks. The general rules of the competition are made clear in the competition program, which in its turn has been adapted to specific competition tasks. Here it is no question of the competition rules giving a true or a false picture of architecture and urban design but instead of their application. Rules are suitable, effective, simple or complicated and they are established in order to attain a particular end; they are not true or false representations of reality. What organizers wish to know is whether the planned task is suitable for a competition and how the rules must be used in the specific case. The aim is to reach good solutions in architectural competitions arranged according to current rules.

For architectural competitions in Europe there are accepted basic principles, even when the regulatory system differs on a national level, or are criticized and renewed as conditions within society change for the profession. The central principles held in common are represented by the *Architects' Council of Europe* (ACE), which has summarized the architectural competition in ten recommendations. The rules are seen as a guarantee for a competition on just and equal conditions. Central is

1 Forser, T. (2006) *Kritik av kritiken*. Uddevalla: Bokförlaget Anthropos AB, Gråbo

2 According to paragraph 17 in the Finnish competition rules, approved by SAFA in 2008, shall the conditions and the judges' report, including attachment, but with the exception of classified portions, be filed in a reliable way. In the case of architectural competitions the competition material shall be filed by the Museum of Finnish Architecture.

3 Toulmin, S. (1953) *The philosophy of Science*. London: Hutchinson and Stegmüller, W. (1973) *Probleme und Resultate der Wissenschaftstheorie und Analytischen Philosophie. BD II. Theorie und Erfahrung. Zweiter Halbband. Theorienstrukturen und Theoriendynamik*. Springer: Berlin.

the demand for anonymity. That is a controversial paragraph in the body of rules. This demand for anonymity in the architectural competition is, as an idea, a result of 19th century liberalism in the emerging industrial society which honoured freedom of the individual and artistic genius. It is the architects behind the best solution of the competition task who should win the competition and be awarded the coming commission—not the architectural office that shows the lowest hourly charge, or presents solutions to the task through a seductive graphic design or employs architects with a good reputation within the building sector.

In order to compare different competition cultures a frame of reference is called for. A fixed point of departure is needed for the investigation of national similarities and differences in the way competitions are carried out in Europe. The ten recommendations set down by ACE in 2007 constitute such a frame of reference.⁴ According to ACE they represent the very essence of the competition in architecture and urban design. The ten basic principles may be summarized in the following way:

1. *The competition objective:* An architectural competition is a formalized procedure for the development of ideas or proposals towards the solution of a competition task, to be evaluated by an independent jury on criteria concerning quality in design.
2. *Equal chances for all participants:* The participating candidates should be treated in an equal and fair way by the organizer who shall also give all the participants the same information.
3. *The role of the jury:* The jury shall be independent and at least a third of the jury members shall be qualified for the task. They shall assess the design proposals according to the criteria of the competition program and rank the solutions in a jury report which should be concluded by a clear recommendation.
4. *The competition program:* The competition task should be clearly specified in an unambiguous program that has been approved by the jury before the start of the competition.
5. *The jury report:* The jury shall summarize their discussions and decisions in a report that is passed out to the participants and the public. The competition proposals shall be shown in an exhibition.
6. *Anonymity:* The jury shall respect the anonymity of the participants in the competition until the jury members have stipulated their recommendations to the organizer.

4 www.safa.fi/fin/safa_in_english/architectural_competitions/nbspnbspcompetition_rules/

7. *Prize money and remuneration*: Prize money and remuneration shall be established in the competition program and be suited to the required performance and terms of submission of proposals.
8. *Consequences of the jury's decision*: The jury's decisions must be fair to the participants; contracts awarded to authors of winning projects shall be set up on an adequate level, and authors in an ideas competition should be included in consultation when their proposals are used as a basis for implementation.
9. *Author's rights*: Authors retain copyright for their proposals, while at the same time the organizer/client is entitled to make use of the winning entries under the conditions that are laid down in the competition program.
10. *Disputes*: Any disputes concerning competition procedures shall be examined by the relevant national professional organization before any legal procedures.

The eight articles included in the present issue of the *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* treat of varying aspects of the competition such as politics, rules, design, presentation and assessment. The articles are revised versions of papers presented at the second international conference on architecture competitions, as part of the wider theme conference *Constructions Matter. Managing Complexities, Decisions and Actions in the Building Process*, at Copenhagen Business School, Copenhagen, 5–7 May 2010. We open with two articles discussing the content of competition proposals and their publication in journals. Torsten Schmiedeknecht describes the publishing tradition in Germany and the focus on functional categories in the competition journal *Wettbewerbe Aktuell*. The empirical material consists of the presentations of winning proposals in that journal. Through their publication the competition becomes part in a collective production of exemplary solutions. The second article by Francisco Gomes and Jason Haskins discusses the way in which architects represent their proposals. It has become easier to follow changes in presentation techniques as the proposals become increasingly available on home pages. Gomes and Haskins have studied a selection of international competitions through the library building type as the assigned task. A specific analysis is undertaken with a starting point in the competition in 2007 for an addition to the City Library in Stockholm and the 2009 competition concerning the Deichmann Library in Oslo.

Jonas E Andersson brings the role of the program in the competition into focus. He uses as his empirical material three competitions in Sweden concerned with buildings for elderly care. The program is a key document in competitions, accounting for the way the organizer has defined the

competition task. Here the site is described, the aims and requirements that the proposals shall address and the criteria to be used by the jury as a basis for the assessment of these proposals. The program works both as an inspiration and an instruction to jury members and architects' offices alike. Three articles follow focusing on the qualitative evaluation of competition proposals. Charlotte Svensson and Leif Östman each describe a competition assessment procedure from within the jury chamber. It is competitions in Sweden and in Finland, respectively, that are brought to light in this manner. Through their case study accounts we acquire insight into the way in which a jury goes about finding good solutions to the competition task. Svensson's description is based on observations of jury work. Östman was himself a member of the jury, here reflecting on his professional role in the assessment of the proposals. Magnus Rönn continues their discussion by proposing a theory that may describe and explain the qualitative assessment of competition proposals. As we have seen, architectonic quality is a key concept in this theory of assessment. The article is supported by a comprehensive study of contemporary architectural competitions in the Nordic countries.

We conclude this issue of the *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* with two articles centring on the relation between competitions and politics. In Europe it is particularly clear that competing takes place in a context of architectural politics. In parallel with deregulation and the growth of a market-oriented approach in the 1980s, national programmes of architectural politics were developed in Europe, with a start in the Netherlands in 1991, Norway in 1992 and Denmark in 1994. In these programmes municipalities and state clients are encouraged to organize competitions. Antigoni Katsakou gives an account of the use made by public organizers in Switzerland of the architectural competition as a professional arena for the development of urban design forms and multi-residential architecture such as apartment blocks. Here the competition has been utilized to further innovation, contributing to the creation of an attractive environment. The resulting positive image of the competition system is contrasted by the second article by Gerd Bloxham Zettersten and Maja Sandberg, demonstrating how the competition may be misused by organizers in order to attain political goals. Two differing competitions in Copenhagen and their political and socio-political context are being discussed in this article. One of the competitions was carried through by the municipal client using current competition rules; however, this was apparently done as a tactical manoeuvre after considerable public protests, and the project was then called off. The second competition had been arranged by a private client outside of the rules, and it was carried out without the approval or control of the Danish architects' association; instead it was presented as a new competition form from the US, purposefully introduced into Denmark by the client, while the intention evidently was to choose an architect, not a project. Together the eight articles are intended to give a complex picture of the

competition as an institution and its role in society building. It is our hope that the articles in this special issue will be received as informative texts serving to tempt readers to continued empirical studies as well as critical reflections over the architectural competition viewed as a societal system, a professional institution and also an expression of national competition cultures in the face of the continued movement towards internationalization.

