

Competition Culture in Europe: Voices

Project Compass CIC

Edited by Walter Menteth

CONTENTS

1	Contributors' Biographies	9
2	Introduction <i>Walter Menteth</i>	15
CASE STUDIES: ARCHITECT COMPETITORS		
3	Inderhavnen Bridge Competition, Copenhagen <i>Cezary Bednarski</i>	23
4	Can Ribas. Social Housing, Public Spaces and Industrial Heritage, Palma de Mallorca <i>Jaime Ferrer Forés</i>	31
5	Italian restricted competition practice Three illustrative case studies <i>Alessandro Melis</i>	37
6	Europas 9: A Decade On Stoke City Waterside <i>Russell Curtis</i>	44
7	A breathing, perspiring tower Refurbishing the sleeping giant, Piraeus <i>Spiros Tsitouris</i>	52
8	A Cycle and Pedestrian Bridge Ile Seguin, Sevres, Paris <i>Cezary Bednarski</i>	59
9	Mai i te ngahere oranga A restricted competition in the Pacific <i>Alessandro Melis and Michael Davis</i>	64
CASE STUDIES: ORGANISERS & ACADEMICS		
10	The Dulwich Pavilion Brokering talent and innovation <i>Tamsie Thomson</i>	71
11	The Tournai Fine Arts Museum Or architectural competitions as a cultural tool <i>Typaine Moogin</i>	79

2 Introduction

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"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." – Anne Frank

This publication comprises a series of essays by distinguished architects, competition organisers, scholars and commentators in 22 chapters on architectural competitions.

The case studies, project data, discussions and interpretive glossary, that together include reflections on historic, contemporary and future competitions and their practices, opportunities and potential, in Europe and beyond, offer a valuable resource and unique insight into competition culture.

The four-year **Competition Culture in Europe (CCIE) programme** is an informal collaboration between three not-for-profit organisations, Project Compass, Architectuur Lokaal and A10 new Architecture cooperative, under the fulcrum umbrella, which commenced in 2017. The aim is to join together with others across Europe who value the culture of architecture, to inform a brighter future for design competition culture across Europe. Specifically this will happen by further expanding cooperation on competitions through the exchange of knowledge and information; increasing access to pan-European competitions by making the national platforms on which competitions are announced more transparent; and by investigating and cooperating together structurally to

agree and support advancement.

'Competition Culture in Europe: Voices' arises from an open European invitation issued by Project Compass in December 2017 for articles on competitions. From among ten objectives agreed at the International CCIE 2017 Conference held in Amsterdam, the subject areas identified in the call for this publication focused, although not exclusively upon two:¹

- Experiences collected from architects who have won Design Contests abroad, to better understand the conditions that apply in other countries, including the benefits and obstacles.
- Critical reflection by architects on substantive competition issues, including their practices and outputs.

In 'Voices' the case study essays from various locations (figure 2.1) are provided along with project data to enhance knowledge and analysis, enable comparative understanding and provide a research resource. It is planned to publish the case studies and associated project data in future on the fulcrum,² to offer the opportunity for organic expansion, growing the capacity to share knowledge and practice further into the future.

This publication continues to build on CCIE results leading up to and beyond the 2017 Amsterdam Conference.

'Competition Culture in Europe 2013–



fig. 2.1
Location of the
case studies

● Plus
● New Zealand

2016' was published by Architectuur Lokaal under the coordination of Indira van 't Klooster for these proceedings.³ Containing the results of an extensive survey from across 17 European countries, with unique comparative case studies, this has enabled clear insights to be obtained, informing both the conference proceedings and beyond. One result of this survey has been the issue in September 2017 of a free-to-use consolidated digital list scheduling web portals across Europe that publish competition and design contest notices nationally. This has contributed to improving transparency and providing access to architectural opportunities for all across the continent, both above and below the European thresholds.⁴ Many such opportunities had previously been obscured by poor communication, which has proven to be particularly detrimental for young and emergent design professionals, who haven't the resources for such extensive independent research.

This web portal provides a sector-specific model for future integration and greater transparency and it is already heartening to see that this initiative is now being adopted by others.⁵

The manifesto '**Freespace**', by Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara, June 2017, issued as the reference theme for the 2018 Venice Biennale, is promoted in this publication – because it aims to build the space and opportunity, in architecture across Europe, for an open and thriving creative culture that can deliver better

quality and value sustainably.⁶

'Competition Culture in Europe: Voices' is organised into four parts. Firstly the experiences of architects entering competitions in Europe and abroad. This is followed by the experiences of those organisers and academics engaged in preparing, organising and interrogating the processes, procedures and results of competitions. Next is a series of discursive essays on good and bad practices in the preparations necessary for a competition, and the cultural constraints, values and vision to deliver more and better opportunities now and in the future. Lastly, Project Compass include their reasoning and their response to the Amsterdam Conference call for a unified language model so as to develop a better understanding of what each word in competition practice means in each country aligned to EU Law and international English (Item 1).⁷ The case study essays range across competitions commencing from 2001 to 2017 and are focused on Design Contests.

Project data that is provided, largely, in the first two parts provides valuable insights into the comparative measure of the processes, procedures, practices, adjudication and impacts of the relative studies. This offers a great resource for informing better future practice. This covers the project locations, and their descriptions by type, size and budget. The project descriptions, by whom they have been implemented, how, and according to what procedures, in how many stages

and according to what regulations and guidance are also provided. Facts are also given relating to the programme and timescales, submission requirements and numbers of participants submitting. Data on the assessment and selection procedures, including the adjudication process, numbers shortlisted, prizes and how the process has concluded, along with further project-specific information.

For those intending to organise or participate, the project data and the essays provide an invaluable resource for charting effective and efficient ways to engage, particularly in design contests. The flexibility, innovations and possibilities offered and described illustrate how best practices, across a broad range of commissions, can and might be further advanced and sustained. The economic cost of holding or participating in any form of competition can be extremely high; this damages

growth and locks out, particularly, young European talent from accessing such opportunities.⁸ With a typical design competition costing UK-submitting participants as much as £45,000–£50,000, matters must change.⁹ This loss occurs across all forms of architectural competition procedures.¹⁰ For architectural culture design contests, because they offer qualitative assessment of design responses, with peer review and anonymous selection, along with enormous procedural flexibility to suite a broad range of projects, offer society and the profession key benefits.

Adopted by The Architects' Council of Europe (ACE) as the preferred procurement procedure for architect selection,¹¹ design contest culture in the UK has, however, been myopically enfeebled, relative to our major European competitors. In 2017 the UK notified only two public design contests on TED

fig. 2.2
Competition Culture in Europe, Conference, Amsterdam, Sept 2017. Attendees © Eva Kasbergen



(Tenders Electronic Daily), this compares to 891 in France, 274 in Germany, 51 in Italy 51, and even Liechtenstein, with 3, had more.¹² Change in the UK from this nadir can surely be foreseen if there is to be any serious commitment towards more qualitative-based assessment and better whole life values. Professionally, culturally and economically it is important for the nations competitive position in the long-term.

With incredible optimism and enormous vibrancy the architects, in writing these engaging essays, communicate their conviction in the design contest approach as a vehicle for betterment, irrespective of whether commissions are fulfilled or unfulfilled. In the essay by Jaime J. Ferrer Forés, the complete tenacity and prolonged adherence to quality and vision, in the face of Europe's financial collapse after 2008, has led to a result that can only be admired (Chapter 4). In Alessandro Melis' essay, despite 'the chances of anything ever getting built (being) less than 50%' we also find that belief in architectural culture is still motivating submissions. Reputedly, and despite unduly bureaucracy, the Italian Government has also moved to ensure international practices submit and work with young Italian architects, so that opportunities and experience can be shared and developed (Chapter 5).

These essays clearly communicate the sheer professionalism architects

bring towards achieving the highest viable design quality. This enormous added value through practice and ethos is what separates architects professionally from simply being the lowest price 'jobsworths'.

If we can look forward to coherence and innovation in developing architectural competition culture in Europe, then this emerging infrastructure is being provided by those working at the client and societal interface developing opportunities, alongside those evaluating, reporting and disseminating the context through their scholarship. These are the competition organisers and scholars working to expand the horizons of possibilities and explore the processes, procedures and results. Tamsie Thomson (Chapter 10) illustrates how an integral part of an organisers remit can be providing a platform for emergent design talent on innovative temporary projects which may then be valuably upcycled, while Typaine Moogin (Chapter 11) describes how a cultural remit may also be delivered for the task of expanding a major cultural institution.

Importantly, the active co-creation of their own facilities by communities is particularly well communicated. Exemplars are provided by two particularly thoughtful projects. Tarja Nurmi describes the community engagement with the brief development and design assessment of the Monio

community school, while Cilly Jansen (Chapter 13) writes about patients and users engagement at the Amsterdam Medical Center. How people engage in successful co-creation while achieving better adjusted creative solutions is of particular importance for achieving well loved, suitable and long-lasting projects.

The understanding, assessments, appraising and dissemination of better competition practice can only be sustained were they are supported by research. Two pioneers in this field provide essays that highlight approaches and methodologies. How action research in design is constructed and disseminated to promote good practice and extend impacts on policy and profession is described by Hilary French (Chapter 14), where the exemplary Donnybrook Quarter contest, its processes and outputs, were interrogated and the findings then disseminated via a website and a highly successful book publication.

How and why competitions can in specific circumstances be misguided, by for example, the briefing, motivations, adjudication, assessment and perceptive concerns, is evidenced by Magnus Rönn (Chapter 15). This highlights how a project can fail to deliver on the intended purpose and do so at significant loss. In architectural competitions there remains a considerable dearth of scholarly investigation, and these two essay examples, into evidential scientific and action research,

provide invaluable models for increasing academic investigation.

The current and future direction of competitions requires, however, that there is direction and vision, that pitfalls are apparent, and that the opportunities for change are engaged with. The essays by Juliet Bidgood (Chapter 16) and Antigoni Katsakou (Chapter 18) describe both necessary foundational premises and how even simple competitions may go astray when perspective gets clouded. Yet for architecture to have meaning and value, how and what competitions may offer, for whom, and where and when, and how they may be constructively considered are discussed by Merlin Fulcher, Indira van 't Klooster and Walter Menteth (Chapters 19–21).

Embedding and promulgating change, innovating and sharing practices and knowledge, and progressing, requires that there be wider conversation on competitions. Competition culture both within nations and across Europe are currently obscured by language which diminishes communication. It is not the national languages which are necessarily the problem so much as the multiple languages and vocabularies which exist internally within nations, including the 'linguistic traditions of architecture', 'architects' own jargon', the 'vocabulary of other specialists' and 'the national legal languages'. These are analysed in Chapter 21 and a call is made for a 'unified language model' anchored, for example, by citation to

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."
Anne Frank

the 'legal language' of European law. Why better communication is thought essential for change and how this might be approached is considered in Chapter 21, while in Chapter 22 a draft glossary of UK terms is contributed by Project Compass towards this process.

This publication by Project Compass, in collaboration with Architectuur Lokaal and A10, aims to both contribute further

towards advancing and improving understanding, and to inspire innovation in competition practice so that competition culture in Europe can deliver better. The voices in this book, despite the many pitfalls described, sing with one voice of conviction about the many opportunities, possibilities, benefits and potentials offered by design contests. We hope you will enjoy their song.

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