

Sixth International Conference on Architecture Competitions

Keynote Speakers

Kristian Kreiner



Abstract

As the conference title indicates, architectural competitions constitute nested experiments. In my speech, I will focus on three such experiments and give empirical illustrations of each of them.

First, the design of architectural competitions is subject to experimentation. Unique forms of competition emerge, most of them probably short-lived being judged as failures or inferior to conventional forms. However, some such experiments fertilize processes of change in relation to competition practices and institutions.

Second, architectural competitions offer the participating architects repeated occasions for experimenting with competition strategies. On a crude scale, strategies can vary from professional to service-minded, the former extreme on the scale emphasizing the *needs* of the client, the latter extreme the *wishes* of the client.

Third, architectural competitions can be considered natural experiments. A number of individual architects (or firms) work in parallel on highly complex, uncertain, and ambiguous tasks. While necessarily reducing the complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity in order to produce and justify a design proposal, they all do so in their own distinct manner. In effect, they can be seen as experimenting with reasonable ways of coping with a paradoxical situation, knowing that only the winner will be seen as coping in a legitimate way.

Framing architectural competitions in terms of experimentation suggests that learning becomes a critical concern. In general, experiments are legitimized by the lessons they teach us. For reasons to be explained, in each of the forms of experimentation described above learning is problematic. The risk of superstitious learning is immanent, and the practice of ignoring history (experience) seems widespread. We need to discuss what experimentation means under such conditions.

Biographical note

Kristian Kreiner is Professor Emeritus at Copenhagen Business School, Department of Organization. In his organizational studies, he has covered a long list of themes and subjects, including decision making, sense making, project management, and culture. For many years, his empirical field of research has been the building industry. He has published repeatedly on architectural competitions, having done ethnographic studies of competition design, architects' production of design proposals, and the decision processes of juries.

Aymone Nicolas



Abstract

What has the role of the UIA been in the past and in the organisation of international competitions from 1948 to 1975? To which point these “modern and universal” competitions demonstrate an experimental approach in terms of procedures, commissioner and building types or even of building programs? This presentation addresses the above questions. Through several case studies of competitions organised with the help of the UIA and sometimes with the participation in the jury of its first secretary Pierre Vago: the competition for the palace of Addis-Abeba (1950), the competition for the Auschwitz or the Dachau memorial (1956 and 1957), the one for the World Health Organisation (1960), and the one for the Centre Georges Pompidou (1971), Aymone Nicolas shows how the dissemination of the competition practice in countries remote from Europe has helped to liberal architecture and to provide confidence into the different agents. The preparation phase and the sessions of the jury were at the moment the only occasions for dialogue and the development of an architectural culture within the upper circles. Finally, the history of the ideas competition launched for the conception of the Art Centre Georges Pompidou between 1969 and 1971 allows to demonstrate after 1968 the invention of a new discipline: the planning and development of new procedures both more discursive and rational. Three indispensable qualities allowing for the generation of methodological, social, and political experimentation are thus confirmed: trust, dialogue and clear vision for a political project.

Biographical note

Aymone Nicolas was born in Mostaganem in 1973 and grew in Black Africa. From 1990 to 1995 she studied at the Ecole supérieure des Beaux-Arts and the Faculty of Letters in Montpellier. Then she went on to study history of the 20th century architecture at the University Panthéon-Sorbonne, where she completed her Doctorate degree in 2002 under the guidance of Prof. Gérard Monnier. Her PhD on UIA and architecture and urban design competitions between 1948 and 1975 was published by Editions Picard in 2007. She then taught at the School of Architecture of Paris-Malaquais and worked as a scholar at the German Centre of Art History in Paris (DFGK) from 2000 to 2006. Having spent during her studies several years in Berlin, she organised various study trips for French architects in the German capital, and also in Vorarlberg and Hambourg. Since 2007, she lives in the south of France and works as a tutor in the field of ecological construction, at the cooperative society Ecoterre.

Jeremy Till



Abstract

COMPETITIVE STRAIN SYNDROME

Behind the superficial gloss of architectural competitions lies a much dirtier reality. The competition system, in its multiple guises and glosses, disguises a malaise which is indicative of a much broader set of issues that should concern the architectural profession. This lecture will approach architectural competitions through the frame of labour, arguing that we have reached levels of exploitation and waste that are both unethical and economically unsustainable.

Looking inwards I will first relate architectural competitions to the manipulative rituals of architectural education, and then looking outwards to the emerging precariat. The former perpetuates a set of conservative values under a thin veneer of progress. The latter situates architectural labour under within the inequities of the neo-liberal market. In both cases the architectural competition appears to magnify conditions that the architectural profession faces but is not engaging with. The story is not a comfortable one because it argues that the human cost of architectural competitions is in no way justified by the marginal cultural gains. Indeed, I take issue with the assumption that competitions in some way produce 'better' buildings. The only bright point might be to watch me struggle to make the connection between Pugin and online logo-mills.

Biographical note

Jeremy Till is an architect, educator and writer. He is Head of Central Saint Martins and Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research at the University of the Arts London. Till's extensive written work includes the books *Flexible Housing*, *Architecture Depends* and *Spatial Agency*, all three of which won the prestigious RIBA President's Award for Research. As an architect, he worked with Sarah Wigglesworth Architects on their pioneering building, 9 Stock Orchard Street, winner of many awards including the RIBA Sustainability Prize. He curated the UK Pavilion at the 2006 Venice Architecture Biennale and also at the 2013 Shenzhen Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism.

Eva Franch i Gilabert



Abstract

Throughout history, competitions have constructed a relationship of servitude between architects and the structures of economic, political and cultural power.

While the concept of the competition brief serves as the initial document for the manifestation of desires, either through programmatic, economic or formal needs, the role of the architect is often reduced to answering questions that someone else has asked. In exceptional occasions however, the architect's ability to reinvent and produce new desires occurs in the form of rebellion against the brief, in which the architect is driven by the pure belief that real needs are contained outside of given principles.

Given that competitions operate in a confined space for experimentation, they have perpetuated and sometimes repeated at nausium, a series of programmatic and social needs – from Museums to Concert Halls – without actually asking what the needs are of society, that architecture should aspire to serve.

This lecture will reflect on the fact that the true desires of our present society are outside of the current taxonomy of competition briefs, and that architects should be participants in the construction of the questions they are asked to answer.

If a competition is the articulation of society's desires in space, what new desires should we consider? What are the questions of our time that we should be asking architects, urban planners and policy makers to redefine the way in which we build our cities and territories? What underrepresented spaces, individuals or collectives need to be explored? And, what are the agents, authorities or organizations from which the competitions should be promoted?

Biographical note

Eva Franch is a New York based architect, curator, educator and lecturer of experimental forms of art and architectural practice. In 2004, she founded her solo practice OOAA (Office of Architectural Affairs) and since 2010 is the Chief Curator and Executive Director of Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York. In 2014 Franch, with the project OfficeUS, was selected by the US State

Department to represent the United States Pavilion at the XIV Venice Architecture Biennale. Franch has taught at Columbia University GSAPP, the IUAV University of Venice, SUNY Buffalo, and Rice University School of Architecture.