From Architectural Policies
to Implementation of Architectural Competitions

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Introduction
The idea behind this research paper is twofold. Firstly, we are aimed to describe how the architectural policies promote competitions in the Nordic countries. Secondly, we would like to present the outcomes of our recent investigation on the implementation level of prize-winning architectural design in the Nordic countries.

During the 1990s, the governments of Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland developed architecture as a field for politics. The policies were introduced as a culture response to a deregulated and market oriented building sector.

Simultaneously, the paper shows how often an architectural competition ends up in a winning proposal and the architect behind the first prize is commissioned.

We have followed up the architectural competitions carried out for two years during the 1999-2000 in the Nordic countries. We were keen to find out if the competitions have been deployed in accordance to their planned targets. The study is based on the competitions that have been approved by the architects association in each country. The research results provide us with empirical data about the efficiency of architectural competition as a system and some idea about its future improvement.

Architectural Policies
The Swedish Cultural Report SOU 1995:84 supports the idea that architecture and design are of the cultural expressions that are vital to people’s well being. The report therefore suggests that the government should take initiatives to formulate an architectural policy programme. A new political area was thereby created. Two years later, in 1997, the Swedish Action Programme for Architecture and Design, *Forms for the future [Framtidsformer]*, was presented.

The public building sector was encouraged by the government to deploy architectural competition and in particular open competitions as tools to execute major municipal building tasks. The recommendations from the Ministry of Culture to national, regional, and local organizations were as follows:

“Public promoters should encourage competitions, especially open competitions, which have a wide range of participants. The decision about whether or not a competition should be held and which form should be used, should be decided upon from case to case. Every
competition should aim at reaching the highest level of quality possible for the end product.” (Forms for the future, p. 25)

The Finnish programme, *Finland’s Architectural Policy [Finlands Arkitecturpolitik]* is from 1998. Compared with the Swedish government’s Action Policy Programme, the Finnish description of architectural competitions is more appreciative. The Ministry of Fine Arts and Education has an uncomplicated view on competitions. The following quote from *Finland’s Architectural Policy* shows that the positive attitude of the Finnish government towards the competition system:

“Nearly all significant buildings created in our country during the past century are the result of architectural competitions...Architectural competitions promote innovation, stimulate the building sector and renew architecture. Competitions are a complimentary form of education and open up possibilities for new planners. The large number of solutions presented for competitions make it easier for people to discuss alternate possibilities for developing the environment. Finland’s successes in international architectural competitions have been an important channel for promoting Finnish know-how and culture.” (*Finland’s Architectural Policy*, p. 24)

The following advice is given in the policy:

“The Council of State encourages public administrations acting as promoters to augment their use of various task-oriented architectural and planning competitions to find planning solutions and to choose planners.” (*Finland’s Architectural Policy*, p. 24)

The first Norwegian architectural policy programme is from 1992. The programme is called *Surroundings as Culture: Action Programme for Aesthetics in Public Environment [Omgivelser som kultur: Handlingsprogram för estetisk kvalitet i offentlig miljö]* and was forwarded by a working group within the Ministry of Culture. The aim was to highlight aesthetic qualities for cultural policy. Architectural competitions were only briefly mentioned. There are enormous differences between this programme and the second architectural policy programme, *Aesthetics in Government Building and Constructions [Estetikk i statlige bygg og anlegg]*, which was drawn up in 1997 by several departments. This programme gave a more complex picture of architectural competitions. In contrast with the National Norwegian Architects Association it states that the parallel commission, which allows direct communication between the organizers (clients) and the competitors, is a specific form of competition. Call for tender competition is also considered as a possible option when areas and functions have already been defined.

The programme frequently refers to the EU’s procurement regulations from 1994 (Directive 2004/18/EC). Much of the text is devoted to describing legal and administrative routines. This is to direct to setting up guidelines for public developers. Architectural competitions are considered suitable for projects with high quality requirements. In such cases half of the jury members should be architects. State-run building developers are encouraged to make easier for younger architects to participate in competitions by invitation. The decision, however, is left to be made by developers in accordance to the needs and context. The Norwegian government positions architectural competitions as a method and procedure which is described as follows:

“Project competitions give promoters the best foundation for further continued planning and in principle is the preferred competition form when high aesthetic ambitions and tasks are to be fulfilled. At the same time project competitions can increase costs and time fac-
tors. For basic assignments, it is up to the promoter to make these decisions after evaluating each case.” (*Aesthetics in Government Building and Constructions*, p. 21)

The following comments pertain to open competitions:

“Where especially high levels of aesthetic quality are required, public promoters should use open project competitions to procure aesthetic advisors. When arranging open competitions for municipal building half of the jury members should have at least the same professional competence as the competitors and at least two of the jury members should be external.” (*Aesthetics in Government Building and Constructions*, pp. 21-22)

Younger architects should be given the possibility to participate in competitions by invitation:

“When using pre-qualifying for limited competitions, public promoters should consider the value of giving more opportunities to younger, non-established professional groups for basic assignments.” (*Aesthetics in Government Building and Constructions*, p. 22)

Danish architectural policy has been developed in three government sequential programmes dated 1994, 1996, and 2007. The first programme was suggested by Danish Ministries of Culture, Environment and Finance. The manifest is called *Danish Architecture Policy [Dansk Arkitekturpolitik]*. The programme stresses particular attention that should be paid to architectural quality. Public developers were encouraged to augment competitions in their activities. Competitions by invitation, open ideas, or project competitions are described as methods for quality elevation.

The second programme was issued by the Ministry of Housing and is called *Architecture 1996 [Arkitektur 1996]*. By this programme the ministry wants to amalgam competitions both in the private and public building sector. The programme specially points out the need of younger architects to participate in competitions.

The third governmental architectural policy programme was decreed by the Ministry of Culture in 2007 and is entitled *A Nation of Architecture Denmark [Arkitekturturn Danmark]*. It is an extensive programme with a visionary nature. According to this programme, the success of Danish architectural bureaus may be directly attributed to winning national and international competitions. One of the goals of architectural policies is to create good conditions for continued development and renewal in architecture. Competitions are regarded as a precondition for growth and development. At the same time, two negative aspects of open competitions are considered. On the one hand, general competitions require sufficient resources from the organizing body and the competitors. Many entries need to be assessed and only the winning proposals can receive compensation. The remaining participants have to work gratuitously. On the other hand, developers feel insecure in their choices because entries are submitted anonymously and communication between the organizing body and the competitors is prohibited. This criticism has resulted in preferring competitions by invitation as the main form of competition. The aim is to make it easier for newly established architect offices to participate in competitions. The following two initiatives are discussed in the programme:

“Similarly to the world of sports, it is important that young and untried talents, who have not yet found their way into official rankings, are given an opportunity to practice in competitions where they can be measured against the elite and prove their value in practice. In cooperation with the Danish Competition Agency and other relevant parties, the Danish Architecture Centre (DAC) plans to launch an information campaign and prepare a series of specific procedures and guidelines aimed at promoting a competitions environment.
which considers access to the market of architectural services for the growth layer...The guidelines will describe how to establish objective requirements so that these do not cut off younger firms...As a part of this effort, a Wild Card list will be produced and maintained for the advance invitation of growth layer companies. The Wild Card list will be based on objective criteria and be open for all who meet the criteria.” (A Nation of Architecture Denmark, p. 46)

The second measure is to help young architects into the competition system:

“In order to promote access to the growth layer of the market for architectural services, a showcase is needed to extol the qualities of the young architectural firms. For the first time, Denmark is taking part in EUROPEAN – an inter-European partnership focusing on development and discussion of new ideas in architecture and urban design. EUROPEAN addresses European architects under the age of 40.” (A Nation of Architecture Denmark, p. 46)

We find the similar political development in Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark. When the building sector became more market-oriented in Nordic Countries in the 1990s, the need for national architectural policy programmes were put into the politicians’ agenda. It is a sign of the times that governments and ministries in the Nordic countries draw up architectural policy programmes. These programmes create a special political area when the competitions are becoming regulated in the other European countries. Architectural competitions were described in these action programmes as a means of securing quality and revitalisation. At the same time architecture has become part of the cultural struggle and is fought possible competitors with aesthetic means. That is perhaps an answer to why the Ministry of Culture issues the programme and not the Ministry of Enterprise and Finance. The goal is to create buildings that are noteworthy and can serve as models for the future society. Competition is seen as an effective tool to combining an interest in design, architecture, and culture with attractiveness, competitiveness and marketing.

**Implementation**

The competition is very significant for an architect’s professional and practical external training. Approximately one hundred competitions are arranged annually in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland. The majority are organized by the public sector, state promoters and local councils. Competitions have a strong impact on architects’ professional identity and self-image. Architectural offices market the winning contributions on their home pages. The competitions are used to obtain new assignments for the bureaus.

About 199 architectural competitions are arranged during the two years, 1999-2000, in the Nordic countries. These are all competitions that are approved by the architect association of each country. The theme of competitions in these two years could be divided into seven major areas as:

1) town planning and urban environment (18%),
2) schools (18%),
3) culture and leisure (16%),
4) housing (13%),
5) health and social welfare (11%),
6) offices (10%) and
7) others (14%), including churches, parish homes, and interior decoration.
The next step in our investigation was to find out in what degree the winning proposal was implemented. How shall we define when a competition is carried out?

We have based our investigation on the following criteria:

If the objective is a building the competitions is seen as implement when (a) there is a winning entry, (b) the architect behind the first prize get commission and (c) the competition ends with a built environment. We have noticed that when the objective is a town plan or an urban design the competition is carried out to its final phase when (a) there is a winning entry, (b) the winning architect gets the commission and (c) the plan has been accepted by the authority (town planning office) to be built. The problem arises when the competition takes place in form of an idea competition. In this case the competition can be seen as implemented if (a) there is a winning entry and/or (b) the specific objectives are achieved. There is no general answer. Every single idea competition in the study is therefore controlled in relation to its objectives. If nothing has happened within four years after the jury section and recommendation, then the competition is seen as non-implemented.

The result of the following up was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Competitions</th>
<th>Completed within four years</th>
<th>Ongoing after four years</th>
<th>Total Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24 (59%)</td>
<td>5 (12%)</td>
<td>29 of 41 = 71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16 (59%)</td>
<td>9 (31%)</td>
<td>25 of 29 = 86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>47 (75%)</td>
<td>7 (11%)</td>
<td>54 of 63 = 86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>47 (71%)</td>
<td>8 (12%)</td>
<td>55 of 66 = 83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Architectural Competition: Implementation Rate and Efficiency, 1999-2000

The above table includes four kinds of competitions; open competition, invited competition, project competition and idea competition. A majority of the competitions during the 1999-2000 were in form of invited competition.

As we have observed the building sector in Finland and Denmark arrange architectural competitions somewhat more than in Sweden and Norway. But it is not only the number of competitions that differ among the Nordic Countries. Also the efficiency rates among them are different. Denmark with 86%, Norway with 86%, and Finland with 83% have the highest rates of the competition that are carried out during the two years. In Norway the time to implement competitions is longer. Still, fours years after the winning entries have been pointed out, the implementation process is ongoing on in nine cases. It is indicating a kind of bureaucratised procedure within the system. Sweden has the lowest rate of implemented competitions. Only 71% of the competitions were carried out as were planned. There seems to be a problem here that ought to be studied further.

The most effective competition system in the Nordic Countries is found in Finland and Denmark. These two countries have a building sector that compete more than in Sweden and Nor-
way. The implementation processes are more effective in Finland and Denmark. Here we find the existence of a strong competition culture.

Behind the numbers of competition there is a culture of consensus typical for the Nordic countries. Usually, the jury needs five meetings to select a winner. This number of meetings represents a rather non-hierarchic way of finding the best solution where the non-architect jury members get the opportunity to gain a general understanding of the design proposal. If the jury can find a winner the recommendation is to have another meeting. Only in 2 of the 66 competitions the jury in Finland could not agree and decide upon a single winner. This indicates the strength of consensus among the jurors. Usually, disagreement among the jury members in the final statement is conceived as something dangerous that have to be avoided. Otherwise the jury leaves the situation unsolved back to the arranger.

References


