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The Architecture Competition: A Beauty Contest or a Learning Opportunity? The French case in the light of European experiences

Véronique Biau, Bendicht Weber and Jodelle Zetlaoui-Léger

The architecture competition is clearly a device with a strong capacity to mobilise various actors during the development of a project: the project contractor, local decision-makers, designers, users and the public. Based on surveys conducted in France¹ and in several other European countries², this article aims to identify the conditions that stimulate interactions and foster the construction of shared points of view between actors from different cultures of the space and its transformation, and then to analyse the scope of these exchanges and the logic behind them.

It will target highlights of the competition process, starting from the interactions at its origin (the call for tenders) to its possible follow-up, the dissemination of results, the forms of capitalisation and monitoring to which it can give rise, via the heart of the system: the preparation of the brief and the organisation of the consultation, then the emblematic moment of the jury process.

The practice of architecture competitions in France is in many respects singular: mandatory in public commissions of a certain importance, providing for compensation for the services delivered by all candidates, thus favouring the restricted competition, leading to an overall contract (design and site supervision³) with the winner of the competition. It has known two 'moments': in the 1970s, it was implemented mainly by the State administration, in reaction to the criticisms and failures of public policies of patterns in architecture; then in the

1980s and 1990s, at the time of the decentralisation process that gave local authorities control over their architectural and urban policies, it was conducted mainly by elected officials in a context of territorial competitiveness heavily influenced by the effects of media coverage.⁴

Currently, the architecture competition in France is caught in a tension between two logics of production, between that linked to the neo-liberal shift⁵ and that of the rise of participatory dynamics.⁶ On the one hand, it is clear that the construction sector is reacting to the need to control the risks and uncertainties of real estate transactions by integrating tasks and phases into turnkey processes (design-build contracts, PPPs, global energy performance contracts, and so on). While competitions are mandatory for the operations that fall within the scope of public procurement, the aim is mainly one of providing technical, economic and legal security for the awarding of a contract, with the stakes all the higher as the contract includes a set of tasks that were previously distributed among several service providers. On the other hand, and in vast contrast to these forms of rationalisation that put large operators and experts in a position to decide according to specialised and unshared criteria, processes are developing that anchor decisions about architectural projects in the legitimacy conferred on them by public debate. In these participatory mechanisms, which are based on the existence of, or the ability to acquire, knowledge about architecture and the city among non-specialist individuals, the competition is

designed in a completely different way. We will see that the competition is then envisaged on a larger scale and for a longer duration, starting very early on with shared reflections on the diagnosis of the situation, the challenges of the project, the questions raised by the diversity of stakeholders – with the experiences and skills specific to each – and continuing downstream with the capitalisation of located knowledge that can be re-mobilised in the wake of local urban reflection, and more generic knowledge that can be made available to various stakeholders and the public.⁷

The restricted competition is the subject of great enthusiasm in the French architecture community and with certain contracting authorities. Until the mid-2000s, in a context of decentralisation, it often involved builders and a new generation of local architects coming together around public infrastructure or social housing projects to support territorial attractiveness, especially in medium-sized cities.

The innovation claimed by the organisers and participants of the competitions and relayed by different media, both specialised and general, lies above all in the formal aspect of the achievements, which contrasts with the highly standardised conception of the 1950s to 1970s. The focus is on the moment the winner is chosen and on his or her personality. The French-style competition seems to crystallise around this high point, on the winning architect or even on the political relationship between the decision-maker and the architect. It contributes to maintaining the myth of a design that comes out of a 'black box'.⁸ The result seems to depend above all on the talent of an architect who in France is still often considered an artist. The winner is chosen by a jury whose debates are rarely revealed for fear of appeal. The competition process is therefore surrounded by a veil of mystery that became even more opaque from 1998, with the European directive imposing anonymity. In this

French context, the competition cannot really be described as a forum for exchange. However, it may be the case in some circumstances.

To demonstrate this point, we have interviewed the protagonists of these consultations and collected documentation that is not spontaneously disseminated. We did not focus on the moment of choosing the winner, but tried to render and analyse the entire project process that gives birth to the competition.

The prospect of holding competitions that focus on when the winner is chosen changes the overall approach to a project and can devalue exchanges throughout the process. This critical finding implies adopting a broad approach to the concept of design that integrates programming, evaluation and delivery activities, and thus viewing it as a collective and social process.⁹ It is thus assumed that the way in which these activities are understood and formalised is likely to promote or limit the nature of debates between various actors during a competition.

We base our arguments on a first hypothesis that the intensity and scope of the exchanges generated by the competition depend structurally on how such an event is imposed or perceived: either as a regulatory constraint or as an opportunity to stimulate reflection around a design problem.

To explore this first hypothesis, we develop a twofold methodological perspective that is still uncommon in research on architectural competitions [Box 2, 3], drawing on a large quantitative survey based on the construction and operation of a database covering ten years of competition notices in France, and supplemented with a qualitative study crossing the points of view of four types of professional actors particularly involved in this procedure. This analysis of the French context is then cross-referenced with the comparative approach at the European level, which shows that

Box 1: The French-style competition

Organisation of competitions is mandatory for public contracts

- above a threshold of €144 000 in design consultancy fees (for state contracts)
- above €221 000 for local authorities.

The design contest is restricted and compensated.

Exceptions: the reuse or rehabilitation of existing works, infrastructure works, contracts without design mission, works carried out for research, testing or experimentation, and social housing.

Steps of the procedure:

1. A competitive public tender notice is issued.
2. Consultant teams (MOE) submit their applications.
3. The jury composed of at least one third of design experts selects the candidates admitted to the competition (at least three competitors).
4. Applicants submit their projects anonymously.
5. A technical commission examines the projects to inform the work of the jury.
6. The jury examines and ranks the projects.
7. The contracting authority (MOA) designates the winner and awards the contract. Other competitors are compensated for at least 80 percent of the value of their service.

behind the generic term 'competition', there are very different regulatory provisions that may favour or make it more difficult to organise exchanges.

The results of these surveys thus highlight a diversity of procedures and practices that seem to be in tension between two approaches already mentioned before. The first is often observed in contexts where the competition is a chosen procedure, and is oriented towards exploring possibilities and generating ideas. The contracting authority (MOA) wishes to encourage the opening of a professional, or even public, debate in this perspective.¹⁰ The second often goes hand in hand with a perception of the competition as a constraining procedure. Either the contracting authority would have preferred to do otherwise, or it applies the procedure with the main concern of ensuring fairness and transparency in the choice of project and service provider. The procedure is then carried out in order to secure the contract that will result from the competition. It tends to limit the time available and the topics for discussion.

We are interested in the importance and value given to design work apparent in these two approaches of architectural competitions; our analysis follows on from the reflections carried out in recent years by Jeremy Till.¹¹

We then develop a second hypothesis concerning the fact of considering competitions as moments of exchange between actors from different professional cultures, and more broadly different cultures of space. This issue was particularly relevant in the way in which interactions between specialists and non-specialists in architecture were organised. We have therefore wished to pay particular attention to exchanges involving and driven by the contracting authority, *maitrise d'ouvrage* (MOA), and not to those more specifically internal to the consultant team, *maitrise d'œuvre* (MOE). After having three major challenges that run through the practice of

competitions, in connection with the problem set out in this introduction, we will focus on three key sequences of the procedure likely to offer opportunities for interaction, constructive exchanges and even the hybridisation of knowledge: the moment of the jury process when image effects can take precedence over substantive debates; the meetings organised between the sponsor and the teams before the submission of bids, where the possibility of progressiveness in the design work is at stake; and the dissemination and valorisation of the results, which can generate a broad cognitive process. The different ways of considering these sequences in the different countries provides an interesting insight into the potential of the competition in terms of interaction space.

Uncertainty in the design process

The research we conducted on the practice of competitions in France between 2006 and 2015 enabled us to analyse the nature of expectations regarding this procedure, its organisation methods, as well as the way in which it was experienced by its main actors. It gave rise to several survey systems, through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups, in which architects, consultants from technical design offices, contracting authorities and programmers were solicited. The research included detailed monographic studies to trace the genesis and course of action in a number of competitions. The results show that in the French-style competition, exchange is not considered an important objective: first of all, contracting authorities (MOA) find it interesting to be able to choose a fairly formalised design solution, compared to other forms of consultation where they must commit themselves on the basis of a memorandum of intent produced by teams, without being entirely sure that the one chosen will be able to respond properly to their request. The second advantage they spontaneously mention is that the competition provides a diversity of 'rich and interesting' solutions, which they did not necessarily suspect at the beginning.

Box 2: Three surveys by the authors on the practice of competitions and public procurement of architectural services in Europe.

1. A first survey carried out in 1998 on architectural competitions and public procurement in the European Union on behalf of the Directorate for Architecture and Heritage (Ministry of Culture and Communication) examined the practices that were being put in place, particularly at the legislative and professional levels, in eight countries (Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal); studies of regulatory texts, questionnaire to French embassies, interviews with clients, professionals, ministries, analysis of the professional press.³⁷

2. A second survey, carried out between 2000 and 2002 in nine European countries, highlighted, in addition to the debates and questions specific to each country, common themes: the motivations of the contracting authority in the search for its partner(s) and in the choice of the procedure to be implemented; the repercussions of this choice on the conduct of the project and on the built structure, the criteria chosen for the choice of the contracting authority.³⁸

3. In 2015, the issue of competition returned to the topical French political, administrative and professional debate, following two parallel reflections: that which accompanied the transposition of Directive 2014/24/EC on public procurement into national law and that which is part of the National Architecture 2015 Strategy. The Ministry of Culture and the Interministerial Mission for the Quality of Public Construction decided to finance two parallel studies: one on the practice of architectural competitions in Europe and the other on the practice of architectural competitions in France (see Box 3). The European survey analyses the use of competitions in relation to other forms of public design procurement, as well as the conduct at all stages of the procedure in four countries (Germany, the Netherlands, Poland and Switzerland). Interviews were conducted with professional organisations, young and experienced architectural and urban planning agencies, public clients (MOA) and a foundation for the promotion and dissemination of architecture (Architectuur Lokaal, Amsterdam). An overview of all European countries has been established based on the statistics of the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE) and the International Union of Architects (UIA). Databases of official journals were used, such as Tenders Electronic Daily TED-Europa (*Journal officiel des Communautés européennes*, JOCE) and *Système d'information pour les marchés publics* (SIMAP, information system for public procurement) for Switzerland. Academic literature, a rich documentation and finally national and international websites and digital platforms constituted for this third study very rich databases.³⁹

These two positions, which can sometimes be shared by the same contracting authorities (MOA), reveal one of the essential aspects of the architectural design work with which the client must deal: uncertainty. This is linked to the specificity of each context (urban, political, social, and so on) and to the creative and inventive dimension of the exercise of architecture. But it can be amplified by the way consultant teams (MOE) are asked to contribute. On the one hand, contracting authorities can be reassured by the regulatory formalism of the competition (definition and timing of the studies to be carried out, publication of the criteria for evaluating the applications and then the proposals, identification of the members of the jury...) leading to a structured argument about the way the choice of a project has been done.¹² On the other hand, the absence of exchange during the elaboration of the architectural response and the difficulty in anticipating the jury's behaviour are worrying. Thus, as pioneering research on competitions since the 1970s has shown, the uncertainty they generate is often considered a significant risk.¹³ Paradoxically, we note that the management of this risk by the contracting authority (MOA) gives rise to opposing attitudes. Either it results in a severe limitation of the possibilities of exchange, or it gives rise to many exchanges: before, during and after the competition. The objectives associated with the competition explain these contrasting practices.

The competition, an exploratory device?

The ideas associated with the purpose of the competition are very different from country to country, and referred mainly to two different relationships with uncertainty. On the one hand, there are the virtues of a 'potential architecture' defended by Jean-Pierre Chupin, where the production of ideas stimulates a debate about a project and raises the competence of the stakeholders, whether or not the project is carried out.¹⁴ And on the other hand, there is a definition of the competition as a legal procedure

with the aim of choosing a reliable and competent consultant team (MOE).

In France, the latter position clearly appears to be dominant. It must be noted that the concern to secure the ins and outs of the procedure frequently gives rise to restrictive clauses, aimed at limiting the universe of possibilities, and therefore the scope of debate. In our survey, 39 percent of contracting authorities (MOA) and 43 percent of architects spontaneously considered that it would be necessary to improve the conditions of exchange during the competitions. In the focus groups, most architects supported and clarified this idea; they advocated greater openness and dialogue during and around the consultation in order to promote the exploratory dimension of the competition while reassuring each of the parties. We were able to identify several moments in the project process that could compromise or, on the contrary, facilitate constructive exchanges during the design process and during the competition.

Prospects for fruitful exchange

A first period of debate is sometimes initiated before the consultation is organised. When the operation is launched, the competition appears as a high point in the project trajectory. As such, some contracting authorities (MOA) use it to support a collective dynamic well upstream of the operation. The clear rules and publicity associated with the procedure, the prospect of organising a jury and disseminating the results of the competition to the press, encourage them to organise a collaborative approach involving local political actors, operators and even facility managers, residents and users. At this stage, the contracting authority is mainly seeking to generate enthusiasm for its operation, to facilitate negotiations on some fundamental aspects of the project (such as financing, location and urban integration, programme) and to avoid blockages.

Box 3: Competition practice in France: a partnership research (2015–2017)

This research was done on behalf of the Interministerial Mission for the Quality of Public Construction and the Ministry of Culture. The steering committee included the Order of Architects, the State Real Estate Purchasing Department, the National Federation of Consultants in Architecture, Urbanism and Environment, the *Association Qualité des Constructions*, the Ministry of Housing and Cohesion of the Territories, and a technical committee with representatives of the various professional organisations of the contracting authority, the Assistance to Contracting Authority and design stakeholders, as well as the Social Housing Union and the National Agency for the Support of the Performance of Health and Medico-social Institutions. The survey was based on diverse devices and tools to answer the following questions:

- Which projects are submitted for competition? How has the number of projects evolved over the last ten years compared to other procedures?
- How do contracting authorities organise themselves to conduct a competition, from preliminary studies to the valorisation of the results?
- What is the place of civil society in the procedure?
- How is the competition procedure technically carried out by the contracting authority and design teams?
- How does the jury work, how does it communicate with candidate teams, how is the analysis of the projects conducted, what are the choices based on?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of competitions? What avenues for improvement should be considered?
- How can we envisage an observatory of the architectural competition activities in France, inspired by examples from other countries?

The research team collected and analysed ten years of public tenders (2006–15, more than 50 000 announcements). This team carried out surveys by questionnaire and got replies from 1 019 architects, 164 engineers or construction economists, 183 representatives of client organisations, and 124 independent client advisers for brief development. Three focus groups were organised with different professional profiles, to get a reflective interpretation of the registered and analysed answers to the questionnaires. Interviews with actors from two major construction sectors (housing and offices), and researchers working on the construction and development of competition observatories in Belgium and Canada, as well as three detailed case studies of competitions, completed the survey.

By taking this path, the contracting authority agrees to debate a variety of options, but this is not a common approach, either because they do not have the means to organise such exchanges or because they do not see any interest in it. Contracting authorities (MOA) fear that they will not be able to manage a variety of requests, that conflicts of interest will arise leading to delays and additional costs. The limited nature of the debates and actors involved before the choice of the consultant team (MOE) is reflected in the drafting of programme documents, either extremely vague and succinct, or dense and fairly prescriptive, reproducing recommendations from previous operations or regulatory orders.

Surveys suggest that the focus of many briefs on constructive solutions and standards – a phenomenon amplified by the required application of environmental labels – are seen as a sign of risk management, closing the possibilities to design work.¹⁵ It creates situations where the competition is essentially imposed and not intended to find new solutions, or at least to take full measure of the context of the operation. It is part of a 'routine' around which the contracting authority would rather seek to generate as little discussion as possible that could delay the completion of the operation. The programme and projects follow a very prescriptive logic, especially in the internal organisation of the building and in the technical devices used. In France, the healthcare, housing and education sectors are especially affected by this type of practice.

What is the place for non-specialists in these spaces of exchange?

Research on deliberative or participatory mechanisms has shown that the richness and scope of debate in preparing a decision are all the stronger as the profiles of the people who participate are varied by integrating non-specialists, and that to manage uncertainty, the organisation of 'hybrid forums' is a possible alternative to technocentric approaches.¹⁶

Could this be the case in architectural projects, particularly in competitions? The organisation of such mechanisms is still quite rare and is mainly limited to consultative mechanisms. For several years, the Netherlands and Switzerland have been considering organising public presentations prior to the holding of juries, with varying degrees of impact of the opinions gathered on the final decision.¹⁷

In France, the involvement of residents in urban projects has been increasing over the past ten years, but it is still quite limited during construction.¹⁸ However, we note the importance given by some contracting authorities to the fact that the project brief is the result of consultation with facility managers, or even with users. The experts we interviewed in several countries also underline the importance of involving them at this stage.¹⁹ If their input is only solicited at the time of the competition, and if, moreover, the criteria for assessing the projects are not very precise, their opinion focuses on the architectural gesture, or the façades.

A growing proportion of designers defend the principle of more concerted briefing processes with users, perceiving the potential of briefs which do not only address technical issues. When asked about the quality of these documents, half of the French architects believe that it has improved over the past ten years, but the same proportion reproach them for still being too dense, too detailed, accumulating technical details too early, or even prefiguring solutions. Whether the briefs are too heavy or too light, they are mainly criticised for the fact that the qualitative issues are stated in a generic way (in terms of functionality, quality of the atmosphere, and comfort). A majority of architects are waiting for synthetic instructions, prioritising clearly the objectives of the project, and making the future activities and uses of the building more explicit.

The literal application of standards maintains architecture as a discipline of experts. It stirs

tensions between the worlds of engineering and architecture, both in the fabrication and the criticism of projects. The composition of the competition authorities reflects this situation. The technical commissions that prepare the selection of juries are mainly composed of technicians or project management administrators, to which are added various external experts (brief developers, cost consultants, representatives of technical design offices, and so on). The commission issues an opinion that sometimes resembles a first ranking of candidates, when requested by the contracting authority, which can then create tensions during the jury process.

Until 2016, regulations required that at least a third of juries are designers. The other participants are generally elected officials, heads of local services or decentralised administrations. The presence of users, the staff who will work in the building, is limited to one or two people; in more than a third of competitions, these actors are not invited. Users or residents are involved in 15 percent of cases, according to the testimonies of project owners who organised at least one competition between 2006 and 2015. More than half of the architects surveyed would like there to be more facility managers in the juries (the second category cited after architects), 39 percent would also like there to be more users. Engineers share this point of view.

However, it is not enough for residents, future users or building managers to sit on a jury, to be able to express themselves and be heard. Monographs that we have produced during this research on the French context, and other works that have given rise to observations on participation in competitions show that the intensity of the collaborative process before a project is launched plays a fundamental role in enabling non-experts to be active and to be fully considered by the other members of the jury.²⁰ This experience is at the heart of a learning process that will also benefit the other members of the jury.

The work in which residents, facility managers and users are involved during the briefing process places them in a position to co-construct and appropriate the expectations of the project, within the framework of negotiations and social transaction processes, obliging both sides to compromise. They also gradually become more familiar with architecture vocabulary and graphic representation methods. They thus acquire the keys to reading and analysing architecture proposals that they use in the context of a technical commission or during the jury process to argue in front of professionals. This moment can then become a space for exchange where they are recognised for expertise that is not only linked to knowledge of use, but also to their experience of the debates that preceded the organisation of the competition. They thus come to express, in these forums for dialogue, symbolic issues or issues linked to the desired life project, on which decisions have been made well in advance, and of which they are the only members of the jury to be aware. During the jury process, the inhabitants are then less tempted to express themselves in their own name and more liable to speak as stakeholders in the exchanges that precede the competition.

The procedural legitimacy thus acquired seems stronger than that obtained by having only followed an accelerated course in architecture before sitting on a competition jury, which is now proposed by some localities in France²¹ or the Netherlands.²² Learning to read architecture by having participated in the genesis of a project helps lay participants to speak with experts, without entering technical or aesthetic arguments, where the ordinary citizen might have difficulty being heard. This type of intervention can contribute to a debate during the jury process on what makes architectural quality, in its multiple components, not in the absolute but in a specific situation. This question of architectural quality, a recurring one in competition juries as well as in architectural criticism more broadly, must then be expressed and negotiated in a vocabulary

understood by all.²³ During the debates, the design teams expect the experts present in the jury (architects and client advisers) to help them understand the impact of certain architectural choices on the use of space, the management of the building or the eligibility for subsidies later on. In several of the cases studied, non-professionals in architecture stressed and appreciated the existence of such mediation, or regretted its absence.

While competitions are places where an ever-increasing tension is expressed between quantifiable expertise delivered by technical design offices, and other characteristics that are more qualitative, but with more implicit issues raised by architects based on their general knowledge of the design process, the opinion of non-professional actors can be vital in helping to reach a judgment based on contingencies linked to the history of the project. In two different cases, we found that it allowed a discussion to be re-launched by going beyond the initial clashes of experts.²⁴ The syncretic value of the questions of use and appropriation from which all the jury members express themselves, encourages a dynamic of enlarged exchanges that make it possible to give meaning to certain recommendations of the brief, to highlight specific criteria. They are all the more taken into consideration if they refer to situations of exchange during the preliminary consultation phases. They can help to remove purely technical expertise or personal opinions that may have arisen from the juries.²⁵ A form of knowledge hybridisation takes place, highlighting general as well as particular experiences of the project process.

Go beyond the focus on the image during the jury process

The importance of having non-expert participation in the upstream phases of architectural projects does not only concern users and residents, but also decision-makers and elected officials, whose behaviour

during the jury process is often criticised in France. During our survey, contracting and building project managers repeatedly regretted the limited time these officials are willing to devote to these sessions, sometimes only two hours compared to the full days or even multiple sessions of debates that some of them had experienced in Switzerland or Germany. One architect said: 'We should force the juries to do real work. You don't choose a project of 10 million euros and more in four hours and yet... yes, you do.'²⁶ A state consulting architect said:

A large number of selection panels are sometimes held in two hours, whereas they would systematically deserve a day. Elected officials or contracting authorities often expect a technical commission to divide the panel into groups to speed up the analysis time.²⁷

The very busy agenda of decision-makers cannot fully explain this situation. The regular members of the competition juries rather cite a problem of competence, a difficulty in positioning or even a certain unease that elected officials might have in expressing themselves about architecture. This results in several compensatory attitudes: shortening the jury's time, standing back from the expertise of technicians or architects, or focusing on the image and aesthetic issues, in the name of the social acceptability of the project or the attention it must generate.

Technicians and architects thus regret consultations transformed into 'beauty contests', with elected officials mainly focused on image issues. An architect explains:

Politicians, when they walk into the rooms, they look at the signs. 'Oh, that one has a nice face, that one I don't like', and that's it. He did not look at whether the building works well, is well placed in terms of mass. And now, to change his opinion, well, you have to hold on.²⁸

Architectural agencies anticipate the potential strength of images during the jury.²⁹ Those that have the means, have teams dedicated to competitions, which leads to significant inequalities in this exercise, with 67 percent of French agencies having no staff or one employee only.³⁰ Architects also explain how they work by integrating this issue from the outset; they develop their proposal according to the perspective rendering that will best enhance their project during adjudication.

But not all contracting authorities focus on formal questions during the competition. Two very different attitudes can be identified among those who seek to stimulate debate around other aspects. Some expect a lot from new digital technologies, for example, to advance a project, and therefore require precise representations in that regards. Others, on the contrary, seek to simplify the media and the representation codes. In the first case, the competition becomes a heavy financial investment with detailed renderings that can limit the prospects for further development of the design. In the second case, simpler representations are required, (white model, omission of a detailed perspective), specifically so that the debate does not engage too quickly on purely aesthetic considerations. The mobility of professionals in different European countries, either as members of competition boards or as candidates, has enabled them to assess these practices, or sometimes apply them. Architects appreciate, for example, that in Germany, perspective is not necessarily required. It may even be prohibited, while hand sketches and volume models are preferred.³¹ Not producing 'too realistic' images of exteriors would encourage all jury members to discuss subjects other than facades, and to depart from the unique and fixed point of view offered by a perspective.

Prepare to negotiate after the competition

The involvement of the teams in the sequence of questions before the submission of the projects and

their ability to answer questions asked by the jury in the event of a tie between several candidates, are signs of an openness to dialogue to which the contracting authorities are very sensitive, with a view to subsequent stages. Fifty-two percent of them believe that the competition closes the possibility of the project's evolution after the jury. This point of view is explained either by the fear of provoking appeals from competitors if they start asking the winner for too many modifications, or by the sometimes rigid posture of the architect, who, buttressed by the fact of winning the competition, refuses to adjust his proposal. Anticipating such a situation can encourage the contracting authority to finalise the programme as much as possible and to integrate design solutions into it before the consultation.

Another way of managing the post-competition period by encouraging dialogue is to clearly specify during adjudication the reasons why the winner has been selected and the aspects on which he or she should improve his or her proposal. The scope of the dialogue that will be established after the competition also depends on the mutual listening skills of the different parties. Mediation work is often necessary between the architect and the contracting authority, but also with facility managers and users, who often discover the project at a time when the design is very advanced. To successfully carry out such exchanges, more than 71 percent of architects and nearly 88 percent of engineers in technical design offices find it useful to have assistance in project management programming beyond the competition. Thirty-nine percent of contracting authorities say they extend this type of assistance repeatedly.

Given the mandatory nature of the competitions in certain types of operations, they are sometimes feared, particularly by those who are unfamiliar with it, whether elected officials or users. The request for

mediation before, during and after the competition is thus quite important for people who are not used to this type of procedure.

Dissemination, valorisation, learning

In France, according to a report of the National Assembly³² and the National Strategy on Architecture,³³ the enhancement of documents produced during a competition could contribute to the sharing of an architecture culture with and within the population. With that in mind, the publication of the results of a competition could be seen as an integral part of the exercise of project responsibility, that of the contracting authority (MOA), particularly when it is based on public funding. This would make it possible to strengthen the commitment of the various stakeholders to quality and transparency throughout the competition process. Such an approach to promotion and publicity would increase the sense of responsibility felt by all involved in the jury's work. For the MOE teams that have contributed their proposals, this approach would become a way to take advantage of an expanded reflective space, and to improve their practice by assessing, through knowledge of competing proposals, the different ways of responding to a design problem. Implemented systematically and rigorously, this approach would also reduce the feeling of arbitrariness and even injustice often felt by non-awarded project teams about competition results.

Different methods could be used to implement such an approach: organising public exhibitions of projects; and making them visible on the project website, in newspapers, and in the specialised press. To be complete, this publication of competition results should include a presentation of the initial commission through the main programmatic challenges set out by the contracting authority in order to be able to assess the different response methods. The projects would then be presented in formats that would make them easily comparable,

and that would include elements of an evaluation grid, with a brief presentation of the project intentions argued by each of the designers. The jury process would then be a key moment that would make it possible, for example, to review the wording of the adjudication order. The jury would then assess how the problems were reformulated by the designers, and make the reasons for their choices more understandable.

Such methods, still expected by some of the actors questioned in France, already exist in various forms and more or less developed in several countries, and in the form of books and journals with criteria that facilitate comparison.³⁴ Architectural competitions contribute in this way to large reflexive discussions based on a variety of proposals that meet the same project objectives, and thus contribute to building a shared culture of investigation and architectural diversity. Accumulated over time, these publications constitute a database that can help contracting authorities to inform themselves, to form an opinion on the eventual profit of a competition, and then to formulate expectations for an upcoming competition. The challenges of articulating different levels of cognitive trajectories through the organisation of the competition thus appear.

There is nothing to prevent French contracting authorities from making jury reports public, as long as they are limited to opinions on the winning project. The dissemination of notices about other competitors would require an amendment to the current rules. Indeed, the promotion of competitions through public access to the results and work of the jury is not self-evident. But not doing so changes the meaning of the competition. In France, architecture is clearly perceived as a matter for experts in the context of a very broad lack of understanding of the contributions made by designers in terms of appreciating the project situation and exploring the possibilities. This is reflected in the fact that, during

competitions, the architectural work undertaken and presented is not publicly discussed as a contribution to improving the quality of the living environment. The added value of architectural quality remains little explained and publicly perceived, and feeds a representation of the architect's work as an extra reserved for those who can afford to pay for this type of service provider, an extra that would embellish a building but is not considered essential. On the other hand, among the many examples that could be cited, the Vorarlberg region seems to us to be particularly emblematic of the construction of a real learning culture in relation to architecture competitions.³⁵ The aim of the organisers was to value all the productions as a whole – both award-winning and all other proposals – in the form of a kind of repertoire of possibilities. In this case, the capitalisation, circulation and enhancement of the elements produced during the competitions are done in a way that situates them within a series of interlinked investigative projects (for children, for the lives of elders, for neighbourhood life, and so on).

The identification of project issues and problems that were relevant in various villages was supported in Vorarlberg by work to develop a shared vision for the future of the region. This reflection on a development strategy has led to a broad awareness of the polycentric functioning of the territory, and the importance of strengthening such micro-centres and their network. Architecture competitions clearly appear here as links in a broad cognitive process, which concerns on the one hand critical knowledge of the territory, and on the other hand the possibilities of acting to improve its habitability.

The rigidity of the briefs as well as the encouragement to produce images of objects that give an impression of an advanced degree of formalisation, are processes that aim to reassure the contracting authority during the competition event, by giving him

the feeling that the design work has been completed at this stage. They contribute to a vision of architecture as result and product, denying the nature of the design work and process that is consubstantial with it, and which, given the complexity of the issues to be addressed, requires a long time, and many exchanges and iterations.

The different methods of exercising the competition that we have identified show that there are alternatives to securing the project by reducing the universe of possibilities at the time of the consultation. For example: by integrating the competition into a partnership project process from the start of the operation; by considering a progressive approach to the preparation of studies; by providing the competition process, if necessary, with support engineering to carry the programming as a memory of the expectations of the project and an instrument for dialogue between the stakeholders, beyond the choice made by the contracting authority. From then on, the competition is no longer thought of as the only moment and outcome of a design process but can be considered 'as the beginning of a conversation around it'.³⁶ Such a perspective also avoids relying solely on the insight of a jury and the choice of an 'angel's solution'. Thus, trust can be built between the different actors of a project (decision-makers, technicians and citizens, designers and other service providers) promoting a recognition and a certain hybridisation of the knowledge mobilised throughout the development of the project.

Notes

1. Elise Macaire and Jodelle Zetlaoui-Léger, eds., *Étude qualitative et quantitative sur les concours d'architecture en France, 2006–2015* (Paris: MIQCP/MC, 2017).
2. Véronique Biau and Merrill Sineus, *La pratique des concours d'architecture en Europe (focus sur la Suisse, les Pays-Bas, la Pologne et l'Allemagne)* (Paris:

- MIQCP, 2017); Véronique Biau and Sylvie Weil, *The Attribution of Public Contracts to Project Consultants in Europe; Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom* (Paris: French Ministry of Culture-CRH, 2002).
3. In France, the project process is strongly structured around two concepts: the *maîtrise d'ouvrage* (MOA) which stands for the contracting authority and its prerogatives and responsibilities, and the *maîtrise d'œuvre* (MOE), representing all the service providers in architecture, engineering, landscape design, urban design, other design specialties and cost consultants enabling the formulation of a response to the brief. The 'MOP' Law of 12 July 1985 regulating the relationship of public contracting authorities with private service providers, and the Public Procurement Code, are the principal legal basis on which most public construction law and contract is based. MOA and MOE describe sets of tasks and not professions, and there is no satisfactory translation in English. We will mention them in brackets for the sake of clarity.
 4. Valérie Devillard, *Architecture et communication: les médiations architecturales dans les années 80* (Paris: Panthéon-Assas, 2000); Maria Gravari-Barbas and Cécile Renard-Delautre, *Starchitecture(s): Figures d'architectes et espace urbain-Celebrity Architects and Urban Space* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2015).
 5. Gilles Pinson and Christelle Morel Journel, 'The Neoliberal City: Theory, Evidence, Debates', *Territory, Politics, Governance* 4, no. 2 (2016): 137–53; Jamie Peck, Theodore Nik, and Neil Brenner, 'Neoliberal Urbanism: Models, Moments, Mutations', *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 29, no. 1 (2009): 49–66; Christian Laval, *L'homme économique: Essai sur les racines du néolibéralisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2018).
 6. Robert E. Goodin, *Innovating Democracy: Democratic Theory and Practice After the Deliberative Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Marie-Hélène Bacqué, Henri Rey, and Yves Sintomer, *Gestion de proximité et démocratie participative: les nouveaux paradigmes de l'action publique* (Paris : La Découverte, 2005).
 7. Pierre Bouché, Claudio Secci and Bendicht Weber, 'Construction de situations de projet urbain et émergence de nouveaux savoirs', in *Recherche & projet: productions spécifiques et apports croisés*, conference proceedings 'Ville, Territoire, Paysage' 17 and 18 November 2016 (Lille, ENSA de Lille, 2017), 115–23.
 8. John C. Jones, *Design Methods: Seeds of Human Futures* (London: Wiley-Interscience, 1970).
 9. Henry Sanoff, *Integrating Programming, Evaluation and Participation in Design: A Theory Z Approach* (Brookfield, VT: Avebury, 1992); Alain Findeli, 'La recherche-projet en design et la question de la question de recherche: essai de clarification conceptuelle', *Sciences du Design*, no. 1 (2015): 45–57 ; Marianne Stang Valand, 'End User Participation as an Input to Shape the Brief in Architectural Competitions: A Threefold Translation Process', *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* 21, no. 2/3 (2009): 108–122.
 10. Thirty and a half percent of the contracting authorities who responded to the survey said they used the competition in cases where they were not legally required to do so.
 11. Jeremy Till, 'Competitive Strain Syndrome' in *The Competition Grid*, ed. Maria Theodorou and Antigoni Katsakou, (Newcastle: RIBA Publishing, 2018), 161–68.
 12. Jean-Louis Genard, 'Architecture et réflexivité', in *Vivre ensemble au XXIème siècle* (Brussels: Institut de Sociologie, ULB, 2007), 387–403.
 13. Paul D. Spreiregen, *Design competitions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).
 14. Jean-Pierre Chupin, Carmela Cucuzzella and Bechara Helal, eds., *Architecture Competitions and the Production of Culture, Quality and Knowledge: An International Inquiry* (Montreal: Potential Architecture Books, 2015).
 15. Jean-Pierre Chupin and Carmen Cucuzzella, 'Environmental Standards and Judgment Processes in Competitions for Public Buildings', *Geographica Helvetica*, Swiss Journal of Geography, special issue on competitions, edited by Joris Van Wezemael, 1

- (2011): 13–23; Kristian Kreiner, 'The Competition between Creativity and Legitimacy', in *Architecture Competition: Project Design and the Building Process*, ed. Ignaz Strebel and Jan Silberberger (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 45–58.
16. Michel Callon, Pierre Lascoumes et Yannick Barthe, *Agir dans un monde incertain. Essai sur la démocratie technique*, (Paris : Seuil, 2001).
 17. Biau and Sineus, *La pratique des concours d'architecture*, 94–95; *Concours d'architecture et d'urbanisme. Pratiques en Suisse romande*, supplement of *TRACÉS – Bulletin technique de la Suisse Romande*, no. 10, October 2017.
 18. Camille Gardesse and Isabelle Grudet, 'Continuité et discontinuité de l'implication des habitants dans les écoquartiers: le cas de la Zac Pajol à Paris', *Développement durable et territoires*, *Dossier Participation habitante et écoquartiers* 6, no. 2 (September 2015). DOI: 10.4000/developpementdurable.10966.
 19. See Box 2 for details.
 20. Jodelle Zetlaoui-Léger, *La programmation concertée et participative: une démarche heuristique pour les projets d'urbanisme* (Rapport d'Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches, Institut d'Urbanisme de Paris, Université Paris 12, 2007); Éric Daniel-Lacombe and Jodelle Zetlaoui-Léger, 'Vers des dynamiques de coproduction et une hybridation des savoirs dans les projets d'urbanisme? Évaluation réflexive d'un dispositif d'Assistance à Maîtrise d'Ouvrage', *Savoirs citoyens et démocratie participative dans la question urbaine*, ed. Agnès Deboulet and Héloïse Nez (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013), 51–61.
 21. Hélène Chelzen and Anne Jégou, 'À la recherche de l'habitant dans les dispositifs participatifs de projets urbains durables en région parisienne : les éclairages de l'observation participante', *Développement durable et territoires* 6, no. 2 (September 2015) DOI : 10.4000/developpementdurable.10896.
 22. Prince Claus Bridge in Dordrecht, Delft City Hall for example. See Cilly Jansen's interview in Biau and Sineus, *La pratique des concours d'architecture*, 94.
 23. Christophe Camus, 'Reconnaître et énoncer la qualité lors d'un concours d'architecture', *Cahiers Ramau* 5 (2009): 95–108.
 24. Carmela Cucuzella, 'Les experts sont-ils à leur place dans les concours?', *d'Architectures* no. 216 (March 2013).
 25. Camille Crossman, 'Faut-il des critères précis pour bien juger?', *d'Architectures* no. 216 (March 2013).
 26. Macaire and Zetlaoui-Léger, *Étude qualitative et quantitative*, 42.
 27. *Ibid.*, 42.
 28. *Ibid.*, 51.
 29. Three-quarters of the architects interviewed for this research in France believe that the competition sometimes or regularly favours teams that produce spectacular renderings. The same proportion believe that the competition favours the search for a visually attractive solution at the expense of a deeper understanding of the project's challenges. These results are articulated in many (and sometimes very virulent) criticisms of the place of image in competitions, for example: 'priority to images', 'predominance of the image', 'seduction of the image', 'obsession with the image', 'image competition', choice of 'bodies linked to the image', 'stunning presentation', 'flashy studios [whose built projects have nothing to do with the image presented in competition]'.
 30. Conseil National de l'Ordre des Architectes, *Observatoire de la profession d'architecte* (2014), 20.
 31. Biau and Sineus, *La pratique des concours d'architecture*, 65.
 32. Patrick Bloche, *Sur la création architecturale*, Report no. 2070 (Paris: National Assembly, 2014), proposition 7, p. 119.
 33. *Stratégie Nationale de l'Architecture: Rapport des groupes de réflexion* (Paris: Ministry of Culture, October 2015) proposition 6, p. 25.
 34. For example in Germany, Switzerland or Austria.
 35. Günther Prechter, *Architektur als soziale Praxis: Akteure zeitgenössischer Baukulturen: Das Beispiel Vorarlberg* (Vienna/Cologne/Weimar: Böhlau

Verlag, 2013); Stefan Obkircher, *Raumentwicklung in Grenzregionen: Bedeutung und Wirkung von Planungsleitbildern und Governance-Prozessen* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2017).

36. Till, 'Competitive Strain Syndrome'.
37. 'Les concours de maîtrise d'œuvre dans l'Union Européenne; application de la Directive 92/50/CEE du 18 juin 1992 et respect de l'anonymat des candidats', French Ministry of Culture-CRH, 1998.
38. 'The Attribution of Public Contracts to Project Consultants in Europe; Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom', French Ministry of Culture-CRH, 2002. www.miqcp.gouv.fr.
39. *La pratique des concours d'architecture en Europe (focus sur la Suisse, les Pays-Bas, la Pologne et l'Allemagne)* (Paris: MIQCP, 2017). Available online at <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr>.

Biography

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