

Paper Architecture as Mediator of Architectural Practice

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Abstract:

This abstract is proposed for further research which would explore the potential of experimental practice in evaluating the design process within architectural practice. Current economic and social crisis have caused general recession and stagnation which create an intermediate space (interspace) for experimental reflection of architectural practices without any propositions from investors, planning regulations, legislation or typology. Current general slowing has created opportunities for conceptual study processes of experiment through paper architecture as a legitimate form of architectural practice. It starts with an assumption that current practice can improve the quality of meaningful engagement to some topic by translating its prudence into a format that develops new models of practice. Architectural competitions as means of that improvement become incubators for creative practice. Competition platforms translating this theory appear as a format that is understandable to a broader architectural audience.

This approach would be expected in academic circles where different opinions should be treated like action, but in Croatia academic operations commonly lack flexibility for creative expressions. Therefore such actions are usually generated by architectural associations. By developing new models of practice, where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, without the strict rules and inflexible frameworks of academic tradition, competitions become the platform of creativity. Research in laboratory conditions, with speculative experimentation approach can improve the quality of new strategies for architects. This kind of research investigates how specific constellations of conceptually placed themes are responsive to feedback from new approach to design process while at the same time serving as trigger for further shifts. Furthermore it should give a more precise definition of new approaches to design processes and their relations to development features. It aims to re-examine various approaches to concept of each individual project.

An architectural competition can be regarded as a 'platform' where diverse findings from various fields of research and discourses relating to topics can be compared. In that manner competitions work effectively as experimental laboratory that gathers different forms of experience, knowledge and backgrounds. Unlike the role of particular architectural proposal, this laboratory's platform becomes important in shaping the development of future operations strategies. The main relationships between conceptual proposals are analysed, highlighting major constraints and opportunities. In this context a conceptual architectural competition becomes a mediator that emphasizes and encourages a designer to create a new vision of the existing states. Conceptually, projects become a sort of reality testing, experimental work with an uncertain outcome. These results can lead to new creative opportunities.

The research proposed in this abstract would be based on a three years examination of unconventional forms of conceptual competitions in Croatia. The case study would be a cycle of international architecture competitions organised by Zagreb Society of Architects, titled *Think Space*, an experimental platform for exchange of conceptual ideas. Croatian scene of open architectural competitions in the last two decades nurtured a unique approach toward realised and proposed projects with quality in so called «low resolution». In 2010. during growing economic crisis and with this legacy of public competitions, Zagreb Society of Architects initiated a series of conceptual competitions under the joint name Think Space. These competitions were not focused on creating any objects of architecture, rules, standardisation or innovations. There were no restrictions in terms of site, program or size, to ensure freedom of participants. It investigates how architects position themselves in some important contemporary questions. All current topics took contemporary social and spatial issues, taking a critical position towards the dominant attitudes toward environment, culture, politics or economy. Each competition cycle had the guest curator who proposed the annual theme and ended with travelling exhibition, publications and conference with award ceremony.

The empirical case study of Think Space is point from where a whole range of delicate articulation between theoretical research and a enthusiasm for design are to be explored. Through analysis of competitions results, this research tries to articulate a process of designing, as a means to increase knowledge and parallel research in similar fields. The challenging hypothesis become a starting point for developing innovative models which can take hold as a new methodological paradigm for redefinition of architectural practice to create a new reality.