Architectural competitions and public participation

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A B S T R A C T

This paper examines how the use of architectural competitions may change democratic and participatory aspects in urban planning. This is operationalised by focusing on how architectural competitions impact procedural justice. The architectural competition is a process where only certain experts and professionals are included. We briefly outline how architectural competitions and planning ideals have developed over time to provide context crucial to understanding how they are brought together in contemporary planning practices. Based on interviews and document studies we analyse a set of cases from the Fjord City waterfront redevelopment in Oslo, Norway. The cases vary in form and organization, from the open and international competition format to a more limited competition called parallel assignments. We first consider how architectural competitions may create barriers for public participation. Then we consider if there is a way to integrate them in urban planning that may contribute towards procedural justice and a more inclusive planning process.

1. Introduction

Architectural competitions have become mainstream in large urban development projects. The transformative and symbolic role of architecture makes it an important part of the entrepreneurial policies that are changing the material and social fabric of the city. Especially architectural icons function to legitimize large and costly projects (Jones, 2009), and the architectural competition is considered the best way to produce these high-end architectural icons. Studies have revealed how the production of architecture is an important part of large scale and prestigious urban projects (Alaily-Mattar et al., 2018; Balke et al., 2017; Dovey, 2010; Grubbauer, 2014; McNeill, 2009; Patterson, 2012; Sklair, 2017), but the role of architectural competitions has only infrequently been discussed (Andersen & Røe, 2016; Bern, 2017; Davison et al., 2018; Garde, 2014; White, 2016).

While plurality and conflicts in urban planning have been a research issue (i.e. Flyvbjerg, 1998; Forester, 1989; Pløger, 2004), and the challenges facing public participation in a neoliberal urban regime have been studied (Hanssen & Falleth, 2014; Mayer, 2007), little has been done to scrutinize the popular legitimation and democratic implications of architectural competitions, which arguably epitomize the shift to entrepreneurial and competitive urbanism. The participatory and democratic aspects of the production of architecture and architectural imaginaries have received little attention, although architecture clearly has implications for social justice in the city, and for achieving diverse,

inclusive, and democratic spaces in the city (Fainstein, 2010; Tonkiss, 2013).

Democracy in urban planning is challenging as it in practice depends on scale and representation, exemplified by the NIMBY-syndrome (NIMBY: Not In My Back Yard), where decisions which may benefit the city population as a whole, may be at odds with and negatively affect specific communities, for example those living close to large architectural redevelopment projects. In this article we do not discuss the content of public protest based on NIMBYism, but rather the implications of architectural competitions for participation itself. We ask if architectural competitions may weaken or strengthen urban planning as a democratic practice. We analyse the democratic and participatory aspects of six architectural competitions, all part of the recent redevelopment of the waterfront in central Oslo, the capital of Norway. We start by questioning how they are embedded in democratic planning processes, and how this may create barriers to public participation. We finally ask if there is a way that architectural competitions can contribute to procedural justice in urban redevelopment and planning projects.

1.1. Normative theories of participation and social justice

The ideal that urban planning—as far as it creates common assets, access to communal goods and public spaces to ensure the quality of life for city inhabitants—should be democratic is widespread and commonly accepted. The discourse on participation and democracy in urban
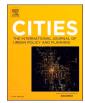
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planning has evolved far from the renowned architect Le Corbusier's statement that the design of cities was too important to be left to its citizens (Hall, 2014). Democratic control and community participation are foundations for the creation of just cities (Fainstein, 2010), together with the ideals of diversity and equity. The emergence and institutionalization of procedures for democratic participation in the 1960's and 1970's (Lane, 2005) was based on the observation and acknowledgement that decision-makers in urban policy and planning lacked knowledge of the lives of ordinary citizens (especially marginalized groups) and had their base in a different social strata from those affected by their decisions. Based on this acknowledgement, theories and methods for the involvement of citizens and lay people's influence in the production of the environment (architecture, urban design and planning) were developed. Davidoff's (1965) advocacy planning and Friedmann's (1973) transactive planning theory are early examples of how the disciplinary expertise within urban design and planning could be challenged by people with other interests, resources and needs, and by approaches stemming from other types of knowledge than these professions. Such theories opposed or introduced alternatives to the planning model prescribing top down and rationalistic approaches (Banfield, 1959), or the liberalistic and incrementalistic version of planning (Lindblom, 1959). One of the most ambitious normative theories on how planning could be made more democratic, deliberative, and based on a broader conception of knowledge, is Healey's (2002) communicative planning, inspired by Jürgen Harbermas' collective reasoning. The ideal is to fully acknowledge the variety of knowledges relevant in the creation of the city as a collective good and achieve this through dialogue to reach consensus. This approach has been criticised, for underestimating power structures and relations influencing planning systems and decision-making processes, as well as processes of dialogue and deliberation (Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998). Regardless of the methods used to make planning and urban design more democratic, in the end its success depends on to what extent the results are socially just and based on socially inclusive procedures, and to what degree citizens have been heard and have an opportunity to really influence the decisions being made. Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, describing the degree of influence by citizens in planning, has therefore become a classic, and the development of socially inclusive, dialogue-based, and knowledge-sharing normative planning models continues (i.e. Innes & Booher, 2004). However, participation and the influence by civil society actors continue to be scrutinized and problematized, increasingly focusing on gentrification and transformation of former low-income areas in the city. An example is Checker's (2011) critique of the planning systems or planning practices in New York City, based on an investigation of the political implications of green or eco-gentrification in Harlem. Critics of urban resilience and climate change adaption agendas argue that policies fail to adequately address social equity issues, pointing to the need to focus on recognitional and procedural justice, or the equitable participation in decision-making (Meerow et al., 2019).

Critics of the rational and systems-based planning have argued that this approach reduced politics to the role of defining certain 'ends' while the planners handled the 'means'. The means of planning were in turn considered as technical and non-political, based on expertise, knowledge and "doing what works" (Metzger et al., 2015). This form of depoliticisation by way of consensus is described as post-political (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2015). Based on Mouffe's (2005) distinction between antagonism and agonism, Pløger (2004) finds that planners and politicians have a poor understanding of agonism or strife and tend to treat it as antagonism. Antagonism is best dealt with through courts, votes, bargaining and other legal procedures that produce a consensus and compromise. This mode of planning leads to a democratic deficit. Acknowledging strife, implies that conflicts over interest values and norms and strife is unavoidable, it must be dealt with. Pløger (2004) argues for a planning system that can deal with strife through an ongoing discourse of openness and plurality between politicians, planners, and citizens.

Procedural justice can be understood as achieved when these pluralities and differences are resolved in a way that leaves participants with the feeling that they have been treated fairly. Participation of citizens in planning processes becomes fundamental in this perspective. The tradition of communicative planning builds this on the foundation of Habermas' theory of communicative action and Rawls' theory of justice (Hillier, 1998). From urban geographers' recent engagement with Lefebvre's call for "a right to the city" a similar focus on participation has emerged. Here the right to the city is a human right that includes a citizen's right to take active part in the making and re-making of the city (Harvey, 2013).

From the perspective of communicative planning the architectural competitions raise the question of how competition results are communicated and how this impacts the communicative process. From the post-political perspective, the question becomes either, what kind of political space of disagreement does it create, or does it create an opportunity for those considered outside the consensus to demand their part of the process? Both perspectives share a critical view of the politics of consensus and are both are compatible with our understanding of participation as a fundamental requirement for procedural justice.

Participation in architectural design has been part of the practice of several radical architects but like in planning there are challenges. Unique for architects is the fact that participation in many cases creates conflict between the public's participation and the will of the client (Blundell Jones et al., 2009). Some architects, like Peter Sulzer and Peter Hübner, have taken participation even further and developed projects that are partly self-built (Blundell Jones, 1987). Within architectural education there is an increasing use of design/build or live projects that engage communities directly, using design and architecture for social purposes and for a community rather than for the profit of individual clients (Grubbauer & Steets, 2014). The slow uptake of such practices, compared to the planning professions (Lane, 2005), may arguably be related to the professional specialisation and characteristics of the architectural discipline. While architects may have a variety of roles in the production of buildings, what distinguishes them from other professions is that of creative design (Owen & Dovey, 2008). Owen and Dovey (2008) argue that the architectural profession more than other professions is defined by the tacit knowledge of aesthetic practices, and the right to construct the value of architecture autonomously. Developing a deliberative architectural practice and participatory design, implies reducing autonomy and revealing the methods and knowledges behind architectural projects, in ways that may be at odds with these features of the architectural profession.

2. Architectural competitions as policy and process

Architectural competitions have been central to the architectural profession and education since the establishment of The Ecole des Beaux-Arts (School of Fine Arts) (Cret, 1941). During the 19th century architectural competitions became established as a method to find the most profitable project (Wærn, 1996). Since then, it has become more standardised and professionalised, along with the architecture profession (Bergdoll, 1989). As more institutionalized modes of urban planning and governance were established, the architectural competitions also developed towards a more routinized and streamlined form (Silberberger & Strebel, 2017). They are an important source of status (Lipstadt, 2009) and good contracts (Östman, 2010).

In Europe the EU/EEA area directives on services and public procurement have made architectural competitions more common and have led to the standardisation and formalisation of the process (Rönn et al., 2013). It has also made competitions more international, within the EU/EEA area (Danielsen, 2010). The Fjord City plan, the planning context for the cases analysed in this article, recommends architectural competitions as a process to make sure that the waterfront redevelopment produces architecture of the highest quality (Oslo Municipality, 2008).

3. The Fjord City redevelopment

This study of the Fjord City waterfront development in downtown Oslo, is based on an investigation of three architectural competitions and three parallel assignments within the Fjord City planning area. First adopted as a general policy by the City Council[1] in 2000 and then later codified in the Fjord City Plan in 2008, it is the largest and most ambitious work of planning undertaken by the municipality. It follows the entire length of the city's waterfront, covering an area of roughly 2.3 km^2. The goal is to reconnect the city with the water through a future-oriented sustainable development of housing, business, and recreational spaces. It emphasises diversity and variation, aiming to make the waterfront an attractive urban space for everyone. Partly a legally binding planning program for some areas, and partly a non-binding but detailed strategy for others, the Fjord City redevelopment recommends the use of architectural competitions or other measures to ensure high-quality architecture throughout the planning area (Oslo Municipality, 2008). The redevelopment follows a pattern known from other cities (Swyngedouw et al., 2002; Brownill, 2010; Desfor & Jørgensen, 2004; Leherer & Laidley, 2008; Marshall, 2007; Smith & Garcia Ferrari, 2012), where old harbour and industrial areas are transformed into high-end urban areas with a mix of commercial, retail, culture and residential spaces.

The Norwegian Planning and Building Act has mandatory requirements about information and consultation in formalised planning processes. Municipal plans and detailed zoning plans require planners to reveal how the comments received from different actors have been considered. The law recommends dialogue and open debate, but this is not required (Plan-og bygningsloven, 2008, § 5-1–5-7 and § 12-1–12-17). Research on participation in Norwegian planning has revealed a gap between the spirit of the law and how it is practiced. Citizens are often only given a reactive role, and they experience the planning process as non-transparent and inaccessible (Ringholm et al., 2018). The law allows for delegating planning initiatives to private developers, giving them an influential position and a proactive role (Nordahl & Falleth, 2011). Civil society actors on the other hand are included later and thus are only able to be reactive (Hanssen & Falleth, 2014). In the same chapter where competitions are mandated, the Fjord City plan details plans for an information centre whose primary objective is to increase the public's understanding of the project and how the waterfront is a resource for the city. Debate, dialogue, and participation is secondary, and it is not specified how to design a process leading to this which would have actual effects on development (Oslo Municipality, 2008).

Bergsli (2005) argues that the Fjord City redevelopment relies on a discourse of competitiveness and attractiveness that gives priority to the aesthetic over the social aspects of planning in an attempt to appeal to the 'creative class'. Aspen (2013) offers a similar criticism of the Fjord City Plan and argues that it relies on culture-led development, prestigious architecture, and a commodification of public spaces through a rhetoric of advertisement and promotion. He further argues that these concepts have outlived their usefulness and defines them as 'zombie-concepts'.

4. Data and methods

This study applies a case within case design (Mills et al., 2010), sometimes called a nested case study (Lotz-Sisitka & Raven, 2004). The selected case-studies are embedded in a common case, that has also been investigated to understand the overall phenomenon. Fig. 1 shows the central part of the planning area and the cases used. The study has applied qualitative methods and triangulation based on different types of empirical material. Two sets of documents have been analysed. One is material from the national newspapers and from trade press' coverage of architectural competitions within the Fjord City. The second set is documents relating to the planning of the Fjord City redevelopment, and the selected architectural competitions. This includes planning and policy documents, competition briefs and evaluation reports. In addition, 23 semi-structured interviews with architects, planners from the municipality and from the public–private sector, property developers and politicians have been carried out.[2]

4.1. Cases within the Fjord City

Three of the cases concern major public institutions, and they all aim to create high-end architecture. Two of them, the new Munch Museum (see Fig. 2) and the new Main Library (see Fig. 3), involved a combination of prequalified and invited firms in a single round competition. These two were announced by HAV Eiendom AS in 2008, a subsidiary of Oslo Harbour KF which is a municipal enterprise under Oslo Municipality. They did so on the instruction of the Oslo Government. Both politicians and planners stated in interviews that HAV Eiendom was selected because of its efficiency and because it was independent of the municipal planning agency. After their initial plan for an 'invitation only' format received public critique, particularly from NAL (National Association of Norwegian Architects) who argued for an open format, HAV Eiendom secured cooperation with NAL through a compromise in a format that combined a set of invitations with a set of prequalified firms in a single-round competition. This controversy partly played out in the press and the compromise was confirmed by informants in interviews.

The competition program specifies that the new Main Library (see Fig. 4) is meant to contribute to making this an exciting and unique centre for the most important cultural institutions in the city. The architectural quality should communicate the prominence of these institutions in the city (HAV Eiendom AS, 2008a). The architecture is further described as contemporary, functional, and innovative, with cutting-edge solutions. The new Munch Museum is described in similar terms, and while adding to the cluster of important cultural institutions, the building should also be a building with an independent identity (HAV Eiendom AS, 2008b). Both programs emphasise how the architects should present proposals that also suggest how other commercial functions (shops, restaurants, offices) and housing can be integrated with the proposed building.

The National Museum competition was announced in 2009 by Statsbygg (the Norwegian Directorate for Public Construction and Property) based on a mandate from the Norwegian Ministry of Culture. Statsbygg opted for an open two-stage competition, where the first stage was completely open, serving as a prequalifying round for the final stage. The competition briefs asked for architecture of the highest quality and of unique character; the buildings should be landmarks signalling their importance as civic institutions. Once again, the competition program specifies that the prominence of the institution should be reflected in the architecture, and the architecture should underline its importance (Statsbygg, 2009b). The format was a competition with two phases, with Phase one being open, and Phase two for the six best projects in Phase one. The Phase one and Phase two competition programs are mostly similar, but Phase two offers a few additional details and specifications in terms of functionality (Statsbygg, 2009a). The buildings' utility for urban development is not as prominent in this competition as the previous two, probably due to the fact that Statsbygg works on behalf of the Cultural Ministry rather than the municipal government. It also focuses more on the function of the building as a

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[1] The city of Oslo has a parliamentary system of governance. The City Government is the executive branch while the City Council is the local legislature. The City Council is the highest decision-making body for the city.

[2] Informants in this project have participated on the premise of anonymity. Given the public nature of, and the accessibility of records from, these processes, informants are identified by generic roles and connected to category of cases rather than specific cases.

Fig. 1. Cases in the Fjord City planning area.
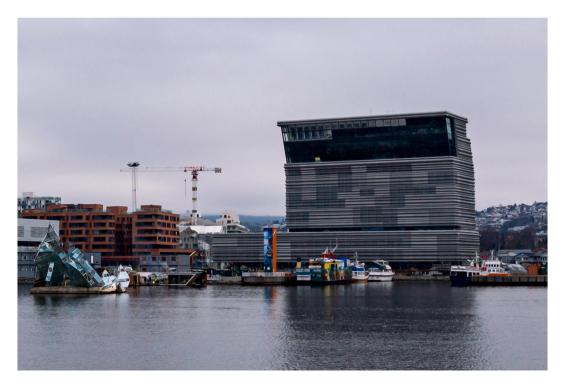Map by Aleksander Bern Data: Geovekst / Oslo Municipality.

Fig. 2. The Munch Museum.
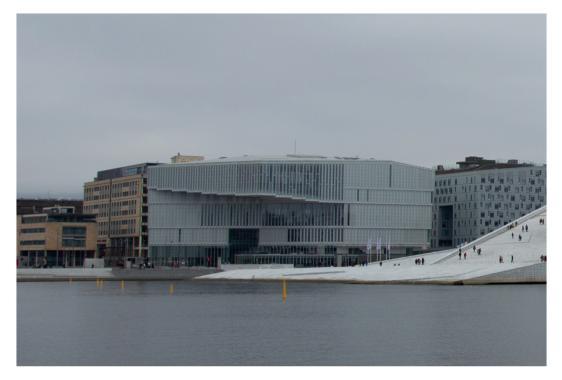Photo by Aleksander Bern.

Fig. 3. New Main Library.
Photo by Aleksander Bern.

Fig. 4. The New National Museum.
Photo by National Museum/Børre Høstland.

meeting place, than its aesthetic quality.

When the jury released their report, the New Main Library and the National Museum mostly escaped attention, while the new Munch Museum became instantly mired in controversy over its design and location, becoming something of a cause célèbre (Bern, 2017). After several conflicts between public institutions (like the Directorate for Cultural Heritage) and the municipality were resolved, the project was still put on hold by its controversy. However, once a political coalition was formed that guaranteed its realisation, the project moved quite smoothly through its regulatory process. The new main library and the national museum required changes to existing planning regulations, and these passed through administrative and political processes, but without

controversy. All three projects were at some point presented in public hearings, as new development plans. The media study reveals that these hearings received minimal public attention, and most of them were not even mentioned or covered. The documents from the municipal archives confirm this, as the hearings received relatively few answers and mostly from institutions required to receive notice by law or institutions invited to comment by the municipal planners. It is also difficult to find clear examples of such hearings having major impacts on these projects.

The new Main Library was designed by Oslo based architects Lund-Hagem and opened during the summer of 2020; according to the latest estimate the project cost 2.47 billion NOK. It was fully funded by the municipality (Joelson, 2020). Estudio Herreros won the Munch Museum contract, and the museum opened on the 22. October 2021. It is estimated to cost 2,76 billion NOK (Henriksen, 2020) mostly funded by the municipality, with a state subsidy of 605 million NOK. Lastly the National Museum was designed by Kleihues + Schuwerk Gesellschaft von Architekten and is estimated to open later in 2021. It will then have cost the Norwegian state somewhere around 6.5 billion NOK (Veberg, 2020).

The other three cases analysed here are so-called parallel assignments. These are limited processes where 3–4 firms solve a given set of tasks on the basis of a pre-negotiated fee and conditions. According to NAL guidelines, parallel assignments should not have winners, but informants, particularly among the architects, emphasised that frequently these processes do lead to firms getting contracts. One of the three parallel assignments was held by HAV Eiendom AS, while two were organised by the municipal planning office, (officially titled the Agency for Planning and Building Services).

HAV Eiendom AS used a parallel assignment named B6A/B6B (see Fig. 5) after the lot numbers in the detailed zoning plan to develop a very high-end housing project. This time they choose not to publicise the process, and the parallel assignment is barely mentioned in the trade press and on a few of the participating architects' websites. Based on the evaluation report (shared with us by informants) of the B6A/B6B assignment, HAV Eiendom AS decided to contract with Vandkunsten, a Danish architectural firm mostly known for their public housing projects. They 'won' based on having the most attractive apartments and the largest percentage of sellable real-estate. The project required a new detailed zoning plan with a subsequent public hearing but passed through these steps without significant issues. The lots and the concept were then sold to the public–private partnership OSU (Oslo S Utvikling),

who then realised the project. Price pr. square meter for new sales in this project has exceeded 155,000 NOK for certain apartments (OSU, n.d.), with 81.000 NOK being the average in this borough as of November 2020 (Krogsveen, n.d.).

The parallel assignments held by the municipal planning agency, Vippetangen and the Medieval Park, uses the possibilities of this pre-negotiated format and gives different instructions to each of its three participating teams. Vippetangen contains today a harbour for cruise ships, Oslo Harbours KF main offices, a wholesale fish market and a grain silo. It used to be part of the military area of Akershus Fortress and several of the buildings are listed for heritage protection at various degrees. The fjord city plan wants to activate this area for commerce, recreation, and tourism (Oslo Municipality, 2008). Informants described how the participants in the parallel assignment were given different instructions: one was asked to prioritise cultural preservation, one to have a balanced approach, and the final firm was asked to prioritise new buildings. The assignment has resulted in an area-program (not a legally binding document) developed by the municipal planning agency which submitted this document for public hearing. Recently it was announced that a detailed zoning plan has been announced to start (as required by law) in the spring of 2020.

Part of the Fjord City planning area is the area known as the Medieval Park. The park contains ruins of St. Clement from the 12th century, and St. Mary's church and the former royal estate dated back to the 11th century. It also contains a pond showing the original seafront of the city and a former railway workshop. It has been used for music festivals and some other outdoor events. Here the participating teams were given different thematic and functional profiles for the park, informants explained. One was asked to prioritise cultural heritage and making a museum park, another was asked to develop it as a neighbourhood park, and the third was asked to emphasise its use as an event space. They all had to incorporate some plans for preserving the ruins, as they are all heritage listed and heavily protected, as well as some future use for the old workshop. After the assignment the municipality held a number of workshops and public meetings where all three proposals were presented and discussed. These were open to the general public. In the end one of the competing teams (led by Rambøl AS) was contracted to develop an area program for the park. Informants, both architects and planners with knowledge of the case, were quick to raise the concern that this contract was awarded without public bidding as an outcome of

Fig. 5. The B6A/B6B (Vannkunsten) housing, building Step 1 and 2.
Photo by Aleksander Bern.

the assignment. Other participants were outraged by this, but because of the lack of any legal recourse their protest led nowhere. According to our informants, the main concerns were that this was an unfair competition because the choice of concept was not made by the architects but assigned by the host. A further detailed zoning plan is required for some parts of the park, but this work has not yet started.

5. Presentation of findings

Our analysis of the selected cases focuses on four elements that are crucial to understanding how the competition or assignment is integrated in the broader planning system: (1) Which organization is responsible for the competition and its program, (2) the choice of format, (3) the selection and composition of the jury/committee, and (4) how the involved actors view the relationship between the competition process and the ideals of participatory planning. This combination of elements allows for an analysis sensitive to how the process is shaped and how procedural equity can be both undermined and possibly enhanced by the competition process.

5.1. Host organizations

The three major competitions, Munch Museum, National Library and National Museum, as well as the B6 parallel assignment, were held by firms partly or fully owned by state or municipal actors. This was the natural choice, as it was the organization set up to execute the plans for Bjørvika, a former politician from the majority at that time told me. He continued:

'We made sure that there was a distance to the municipal planning office and to the executive political branch, and that nobody from the city council should be in the jury'.

In other words, if the municipal planning office also hosted the competition, they would be unable to remain independent in its evaluation and future casework related to the project. This view was also expressed by other planners both in municipal and public–private institutions. Politicians who represented the opposition at the time, disagreed with this, claiming that this weakened the democratic control of the process. One of them said:

'This moves the decision-making process away from the elected representatives, not formally as it still is the City Council that has the final word, but the threshold for saying no to a competition winner is very high'.

However, a former planner in one of the public–private entities said:

'The distance has always been much shorter than people think, but the politicians let Oslo Harbour take the lead'.

One architect who served in the jury for one of these projects, was even more critical:

'It's convenient to use the property developer firms, they distance themselves from their own politics. It's a manipulative form of governance'.

However, a planner working within one of the public–private entities said:

'If we did something that the city government did not like, we would be under new leadership rather quickly',

Clearly this informant felt that the organization was under some degree of political control.

Of the three parallel assignments, two (the Medieval Park and Vippetangen) were initiated by the municipal planning office. The B6 assignment was initiated by HAV Eiendom, but in contrast to the Munch Museum and National Library competitions, B6 was not done on instruction of the city government, but rather as part of their general mandate as a property developer. Developing planning programs and later planning regulations for the Medieval Park and Vippetangen are tasks the municipal planning office is regularly given by the city government and is part of the planning office's routine work. Both assignments have been used to inform this kind of work by producing and exploring concepts, ideas, and debates in processes where the municipal planners exert quite a bit of control.

The competition programs for these parallel assignments make it very clear in their introduction that they are the result of consultation and input from many other organizations, most of them municipal. Similar statements can be found in the programs for the Munch Museum, the Main Library, and the National Museum. This type of coordination among actors has become common in today's planning system. One municipal planner interviewed emphasised that these early meetings were important for the public planning agency's approach as a regulatory authority. The earlier they could be involved (in projects initiated by private developers), the easier it was to have an impact. The circulation of early drafts along with an invitation to comment and provide input may help ground the project in the broader system of institutions and actors that makes up the planning system.

5.2. Choice of format

The difference between architectural competitions and parallel assignments is of importance to informants, and it is important for the present analysis because the differences in organization have consequences for the barriers to and opportunities for participation. It is generally agreed on and accepted by the informants that large public works like museums and libraries should have and are expected (among architects and the public) to have architectural competitions. Private firms rarely initiate openly announced competitions, while public–private organizations do them when such competitions are considered part of their politically defined tasks. The parallel assignment is much more used. According to our informants there are two main reasons for this.

First, the parallel assignment is similar to standard procurement of consultancy-services, or as one private sector developer said it:

'I'll use someone I know and like, and maybe someone I have heard is supposed to be good'.

For municipal actors, the contracts will usually be of a size that they require public bidding.

'We select those that show the best understanding of the competition brief, and then we look too at how they have composed their team',

a municipal planner explained. As a process the parallel assignment is much more flexible. It does not require anonymous participants, which allows the organizer to be much more hands-on during the process. This allows midway seminars to be arranged where the host and all the participants share and discuss the work of all the different teams. Often one or two external speakers are also invited. In parallel assignment teams do not even need to have identical tasks but may explicitly be asked to take different approaches to heritage protection, as in the case in both the Medieval Park and Vippetangen assignments. When assignments are complete, architects are paid their pre-negotiated fee, and the assignment is done. For the host, the results are, as one planner said: 'Completely non-binding', making parallel assignments 'much easier to deal with'. Since the goal is not to find a winner, the host organization is free to do what they please with the results at this stage as they retain the rights to the submitted work.

The second reason is risk. Few parallel assignments are widely presented and debated in the media, compared to competitions. As one private developer said,

'The upside is that you can pick your candidates in peace and avoid public attention'.

The interviewed representatives from NAL were aware of the risk of participating in open competitions. They jokingly referred to it as the; 'fear of the envelope', referring to the envelope opened when a winner is declared and revealing what firm or team behind the winning proposal. Since open competitions do not have any prequalifying requirements there is a risk that the developer is saddled with an architect that does not have the required experience or a firm that is simply too small to develop and realise the project. One representative of a public–private organization said:

'Even if they can develop a good concept, it is not certain that they have the competency to carry out their design'.

One architect who worked on one of the parallel assignments analysed here said:

'The scary thing with competitions is that you risk getting a project that nobody wants. I think that can easily happen; the jury could be seduced by a plan that really isn't good'.

She added:

'As a property developer I understand that you would rather have parallel assignments, pay the teams, and then do as you like'

From this brief discussion of formats, we can already see that the parallel assignments are less regulated by the rules and orthodoxy of traditional open architectural competitions. They give the host organization greater freedom to bring elements of public participation into the process. But when this happens, it is a deliberate choice on part of the organizer and not something inherent in the format. For open competitions it is the requirement of the independent jury of experts that is key. The use of an independent jury shifts control away from host organizations to a place that is outside normal democratic forums. This locates the judgment of quality in architecture to a setting that is inaccessible to non-professionals, just as the architects interviewed preferred.

5.3. Jury composition

Looking at the history of architectural competitions in France, Italy, or England (Bergdoll, 1989), there has at times been a clear tension, if not open conflict, between the professional architects and other building or planning professions, and as well as with the engaged laypersons. This conflict has been about who can enter and win competitions, and more importantly here, who can judge on architectural quality. Like professional organizations in other countries, NAL has fought hard to establish and maintain elements of the competition system. This takes two main forms. First, they promote a set of rules and principles for competitions. NAL has little formal power but will ask members not to participate in and will publicly criticise competitions that do not conform to their guidelines. Secondly, they will defend competitions and insist that if done properly, they create high-quality architecture and that hosting them creates an obligation to build the winner.

The composition of the jury for competitions, and the evaluation procedure for parallel assignments, are described in the competition program. Architects may use this to assess how serious the project is and will only participate if they feel confident that the jury or committee is capable of judging fairly. One architect said he always looked at the designs and projects the architects in the jury had done themselves:

'Are they behind the type funny architecture like many starchitects, or something like that, they cannot choose the right architecture'.

According to guidelines from NAL a competition jury should consist of at least one third architects or at least two architects, appointed by NAL. In addition, there will be a jury secretariat which is also often another architect suggested by NAL. NAL will sometimes also take on the role as secretariat, meaning that they handle incoming proposals, securing anonymity, etc. The jury will also include representatives from the host organization, the director of the institution that the building is

built for, as well as a couple of directors from similar institutions in a neighbouring country. Usually a couple of engineers are included. The jury also has a long list of expert consultants that they use to help evaluate special aspects of projects. For parallel assignments, the format varies more, but in all three cases analysed here, the host organization chose to consult with other municipal organizations while evaluating the project, and in the case of B6 with a couple of private consultants.

Politicians from different parties had different views on whether politicians should sit in the jury. The representative for the Conservative Party was very clear that representatives from the city council had no role to play on the jury, saying:

'There should be a clear distance [from the competition] to the politicians on the city council'.

The representatives from the Red Party and the Green Party both thought elected officials should be part of the jury, to better protect the public and societal interests.

5.4. Participation and democratic planning

The informants were asked directly about how the competition process fits with the ideals and concepts of participatory and democratic planning, which is pivotal for procedural justice in architectural competitions. The interviewed architects expressed that public participation was either something that had to be done in the ordinary planning process, before competitions were announced, or afterwards in the process of working out the details of how the spaces around the building were to be developed. One of the interviewed architects and a jury member was very clear about the benefits of including stakeholders early in the process, saying:

'It is very useful to reach a common understanding of reality, a common understanding of what problem we are solving'.

But the public is only represented through organizations perceived by the developers to be relevant and respected.

The architects interviewed in general expressed discomfort regarding the notion of popular opinion and public voting as mechanisms for selecting competition winners. One architect involved in one of the three open competitions expressed it very clearly:

'What to build and where to build it should be a democratic process. But you cannot vote on who is a good architect or not'.

Another architect said:

'It is the jury that has the opportunity to properly understand a project. It is not possible for just anyone to do that with a few drawings taken off the Internet, it takes a lot of time to really understand these things.'

Placing participation after the competition was also mentioned. Architects then used the term 'user participation', implying that the users work over the details with architects to ensure functionality and purpose. Further, creating a project that was flexible enough to accommodate user input after the competition stage was valued by some of the architects.

None of the architects interviewed signalled any willingness to integrate any participatory practice in the development of competition entries beyond this. The design of buildings, facades and other aesthetic practices is a considered a professional domain the architects wish to protect, in line with the believed autonomy of the architectural profession (Owen & Dovey, 2008). One architect commented:

'Once you have given the task to an architect, there is no more democracy. You simply must trust the architect you have chosen. In the end, if the building is bad, you have chosen the wrong architect'.

While the architects mostly emphasised that participation was something that would occur before the competition, the planners

interviewed had a traditional conceptualization of participation in line with the paragraphs in the planning law, focusing on the mandatory public hearing of plans and planning programs. These hearings can happen both before and after the competition. If used before they can potentially shape the parameters and the contents of the brief, while if afterward they can be used as part of the evaluation: deciding either who wins or offering feedback on the proposed solutions. Architects interviewed were very positive to participation as part of the development of the competition program.

'To make the program you should have a thorough participatory process so that the program deals with the full set of concerns',

One of the architects said. Another said that they saw; 'the use of participatory methods to specify and clarify the program goals', as something positive.

Some architects and planners expressed a view that participatory strategies should be part of planning competitions, but not competitions that are aimed directly at building projects.

Regarding the two more area and planning-oriented parallel assignments, there is clearly a willingness to include participation processes. Both Vippetangen and the Medieval Park have received proposals where the architects themselves suggest using participatory processes to further develop the content and the activities the plan deals with (or the 'programming' of the spaces, which is the term architects and planners frequently use). In the case of the Medieval Park, the organizers chose to have a public meeting and a workshop where people gave their opinions and commented on the three different proposals that were generated, and this was done before the organizing committee wrote the final evaluation report on the project. Elements from the participation then became part of the foundation for the evaluation done by the work group consisting of multiple municipal agencies and Norwegian Railroads (Bane Nor). In this way public participation did become part of the judgment, albeit in a selective and curated way as the public were only presented a limited set of options. One of the groups participating in the parallel assignments was then hired to use the outcomes from the assignments and its evaluation to develop a landscape plan. This plan outlines the ambitions and goals for the area and its different parts. The plan has been circulated among work group members, but no official round of public hearing has been held. Additional detailed regulations still need to be developed and adopted before certain elements can be realised.

6. Discussion

Architectural competitions are a departure from the standard planning process. Whether competitions change participatory strategies, or the mode of participation, must be understood in contrast to the ordinary planning process. As mentioned, previous research has revealed that Norwegian planning practices in general only partly live up to their own ambitions, even if the specific rules of the law are followed. The architectural competitions investigated here are even less participatory. Although competitions may be highly publicised events, the processes are not transparent and communication with the public is mostly one-way, most importantly when winners are announced. The lack of transparency is evident in the competition programs and in the closed off nature of the jury process. The competition risks increasing the existing lack of transparency in the planning system (Ringholm et al., 2018). When competitions are hosted by subsidiary organizations such as HAV or Statbygg, this is in line with the current trend of delegating planning to the private sector. While these institutions are publicly owned, their mandate and their mode of operation are closer to that of private companies than public bureaucracies (Nordahl & Falleth, 2011), which sets a different frame for deliberation in planning and design.

The use of competitions and parallel assignments potentially changes some of the power relations normally governing planning. In this study it is clearly seen in the use of an independent jury in the Munch Museum,

Main Library and National Museum cases. Winning gives architects more power in their further negotiations and in the realisation of their vision. In contrast, parallel assignments allow for much tighter control of the processes, and as our cases show, this can still open up for participation beyond what is mandated by law, as in the Medieval Park project.

Architectural competitions, no matter the format, are decision-making processes. The normative ideal of procedural justice or equity means that all stakeholders should be able to participate in a non-discriminatory process, and that this participation should have an impact throughout the process (Healey, 2002; Hillier, 1998). The mainstream architectural competition has no other role to offer the public than that of the spectator, meaning that participation is limited to receiving information at various points throughout the process. It is not a process set up to deal with disagreement or strife, as Pløger (2004) suggests democratic planning should be. Rather it is a process set up to be used for what Metzger et al. (2015) would call the construction of consensus.

Architects and urban designers are not opposed to a higher level of participation, but we find it is a matter of when and how it is appropriate. What types of buildings to build and where to build them are seen as appropriate questions for public opinion, and architects are open to include users in the design of functional needs. However, when it comes to architectural forms and aesthetics, participation is outright rejected. This reflects a particular way of thinking about architecture and architectural work, where expertise practices should not be scrutinized by the public. It is a way to separate experts from non-experts, which can be put to use in pursuing consensus politics. Our findings confirm the autonomous role of architects in the design of buildings (Owen & Dovey, 2008).

This is clearly a barrier for transparency and denies the public and non-expert stakeholders an equal status in the process. It illustrates how the architectural competition has become a paradoxical process as public conversation and debates are welcomed or even praised in general, but only as long as they have no actual effect on the outcome of the process. While normative models locate participation at different stages of the planning and design process, architecture competitions usually provide solutions for quite complete projects, thereby limiting the space for participation, deliberation and public impact on the final project. The competition brief supposedly defines the relevant problems or questions, while the winner has provided the best answer. This eliminates any real need for participation as the best solutions have already been found, the expert participants and the expertise in the jury has answered most, if not all, relevant questions about the project at hand. In other words, the architectural competition allows expertise to dominate at the cost of participatory and democratic spaces in the process.

In the final proposal for the Medieval Park Landscape plan, input from public meetings and workshops, as well as consultations with selected civic organizations, were important inputs in for the final plan. Such user participation is not unusual for municipal led processes and is more in line with established norms for planning participation in Norway. This is because the requirements of the Norwegian Planning and Building Act sets these processes up as a requirement for municipal plans and detailed zoning plans.

The Municipal Planning and Building Agency in Oslo is, in the context of this study, more oriented towards public participation, or at least a public and transparent process, than other organizations. Information strategies and hearings are part of most planning processes and, at least those mandated by the Planning Law and have led to the institutionalization of appropriate principles and practices. This study shows that the Planning and Building Agency to a larger degree than the other organizations that host competitions in this study, adheres to basic principles of participation. However, there is a substantial space for interpretation and the development of inclusionary practices, within the planning system and framework. One of our findings is that the culture and the practices of the host organizations are of importance to whether competition creates barriers to public participation, or if it provides possibilities for more inclusive and democratic processes. It should still

be noted that the process as run by the municipality also frequently falls short of the ambition. Public hearings are in general simply announcements, and there are few tools and practices to secure broad participation of groups with fewer resources or disadvantaged communities. All the cases analysed here are followed up by some planning work that by law requires public hearings, but these hearings mostly receive few answers, and it is difficult to find examples of major changes; which is what previous research would lead one to expect (Hanssen & Falleth, 2014).

In this paper we ask if architectural competitions can strengthen procedural justice and equity in urban redevelopment and planning projects. Community participation is foundational for policies and plans to develop a just city, along with the aims for diversity and equity. The new Main Library, the two museums and the Medieval Park are projects that potentially can contribute to the social infrastructure of the city centre. Institutions like these can be very important spaces in the daily life of city inhabitants and can be important to the development and maintenance of social communities (Klinenberg, 2018). It is notable that only in the Medieval Park case, the planners explicitly tried to connect its function and content to the immediate context by instructing one of the teams to work up a proposal for the park as one mainly serving the needs of its existing neighbourhood. In the other cases the institutions are seen as serving the entire city, and in the two museum cases an international audience. The context, in these other cases, is treated in a way that prioritises the physical space, and there is little concern regarding their social aspects (especially their social inclusiveness), except that they need to be lively and attractive.

7. Conclusion

Despite their potential to generate broad public interest and debate, architectural competitions are not processes organized to engage with the viewpoints or concerns of any generalised public. In the Fjord City planning context, competitions have been used to legitimize the overall planning strategy, and the process has been set up to be independent of the public and its representatives. The architectural competitions have in most cases led to planning processes that fall short of the normative ideals of participatory and democratic planning. We have shown how design experts came to dominate the process as the choices and decisions resulting from deciding on a winning architectural project, limit the possibilities for participation. Regarding our question whether architectural competition could contribute to procedural justice in urban redevelopment and planning, the study presented here suggests two main lessons that could make architectural competitions more compatible with the normative theories of planning discussed earlier in this article.

First, if architecture competitions are to help create procedural justice and more equitable outcomes, the process could be improved by engaging a wider range of stakeholders from the start, in shaping the competition brief, and in particular the definition of problems and requirements. Social inclusion through procedural justice could be the basic premise of the competition and allow for participation in the development of the competition program. Participation can be realised if it is part of the political strategy behind the competitions. The architects could move in this direction on their own initiative, as there is nothing in the competition briefs or format that stops them from creating projects that productively engage with a broad set of publics in the development of their proposals, at least not for the post-competition phases. Architecture has its own tradition of participatory design (Blundell Jones et al., 2009), and radically engaged architects like the CIAM and Team 10 member Giancarlo De Carlo who, in contrast to the infamous Le Corbusier quote, wrote that: "Architecture is too important to be left to architects" (De Carlo, 2009: 13). Place-making as an architectural practice could be constructively informed by an understanding of place-making as a socio-spatial process (see Dovey, 2010). This means acknowledging inhabitants' experiences and facilitating

participation in the construction of places, for example in appropriating and modifying space to create place. However, in developing theoretically informed strategies there is a need to improve the connection between planning theory focusing on participatory and communicative processes (Healey, 2002; Innes & Booher, 2004) and architectural theory focusing on architectural expertise and autonomy, as well as the role of knowledge and methodology within architectural practice (Deamer, 2015; Larson, 1995). Competitions have an important role in both producing and reproducing standards of good architecture (Ramberg, 2010; Rustad, 2009; Tostrup, 2009), and the status of participatory design could be heightened if competitive entries were based on public deliberation and involvement.

Second, architects could adopt a more inclusionary approach, relinquish their monopoly on the definition of architectural quality and thereby challenge the autonomous role of architects, as Owen and Dovey (2008) points out. The strength of architectural competitions is their role in the creation of ideas and concepts that are legible and engaging to a diversity of people. The visual imaginary of competition proposals translates abstract plans into concrete projects and renders them socially meaningful. For institutions serving the entire city, this becomes complicated, but the accessibility and the readability of the highly visual competition proposals could be put to good use when communicating with different people or publics. Having a set of high-quality alternatives could help improve participation by giving the public and the planner a set of shared alternative visions to base their conversations on. Here we see a need to develop theories on the role of architectural imaginations, renderings and animations, and their potential to facilitate an open discourse on the role of architectural projects (Degen et al., 2015; Melhuish et al., 2016; Nastasi, 2016; Nastasi & Ponzini, 2018; Rose et al., 2014), particularly how they can be utilized in developing the architectural and spatial basis for social infrastructure (Klinenberg, 2018; Latham & Layton, 2019). There is certainly a great potential for the competition process to be made more accessible and set up in a way that would leverage its strengths for better communication and through this a more equitable and just planning process.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Aleksander Bern: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Per Gunnar Røe:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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