

Newsletter – Competition Culture

Ten concrete steps to improve competition culture for architecture in Europe in just one year. Last week in Amsterdam, Architectuur Lokaal organized the first two-day conference on Competition Culture in Europe. The results of research in seventeen countries were presented, compared, and supplemented with knowledge from other countries. The meeting served as the start of a four-year project geared towards improving the accessibility and transparency of competitions in Europe. At the close of the conference, concrete agreements were made which are feasible within one year and will be carried out by the representatives of the more than 25 countries that were present.

Our goals in the coming year are as follows:

- 1) To put together a dictionary of terms that will provide a better understanding of what each word means in each respective country. Through interpretations of legal terminology and ‘international English’, a seemingly neutral word like ‘competition’ can be determined to be not unbiased. In some countries, ‘competition’ is meant as both a contest and procurement; in others, it is simply a contest. This is just one confusing example of understanding in a list of over 70 words that are culturally skewed per country;
- 2) To gather the experiences of (Dutch) architects who have won a competition abroad, in order to gain insight into the benefits and obstacles that emerge after winning a commission;
- 3) To collect data that contributes to misunderstandings and prejudices in contest culture, such as the persistent untruth that all problems come from Brussels;
- 4) To collect data that provides insight into how European, national, and local laws and regulations are (unnecessarily) layered in each country;
- 5) To supplement the research by adding countries in Europe which did not participate in the survey during the project’s first stage, in order to broaden the level of support and insight;
- 6) To gather all the guidelines and other useful knowledge for organizing a good competition, as formulated in the various countries by (primarily) local architects or architectural organizations, and which generally constitute a sensible list of universal *dos and don’ts*;
- 7) To expand the digital overview of platforms in the various countries which announce competitions (especially those below the procurement thresholds) and are also accessible to smaller offices and young architects in Europe, so knowledge of competitions such as [link: <http://cshq-citycampus.cz/>] can reach the Netherlands (and other countries) as well;
- 8) To encourage the formulation of an academic module for students themed ‘design competition rules’. Almost all of the conference participants are also affiliated with a university or academy;
- 9) To stimulate a critical attitude from the architects themselves: for instance, first read the rules before taking a jury position, as its precise nature is not always obvious in the long run. Knowingly participating in a substandard competition still occurs far too often;
- 10) To put together a ‘bottom-up’ competition as an experiment, in order to involve a broader public in the spatial issues that concern us all.

The results of this action list will be presented next autumn at a second conference on competition culture in Europe. On 24 May 2018, Architectuur Lokaal, A10 New European Architectural Cooperative, Project Compass CIC, and the Italian Organization for Architecture Criticism (AIAC) will set forth an intermediate position at Palazzo Widmann during the Venice Biennale.

