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Architecture competitions in an urban planning context

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ABSTRACT
This paper analyzes discussions and controversy surrounding the architecture competitions that have been part of a large-scale waterfront redevelopment plan called the Fjord City plan in Oslo, Norway. Particular attention is given to the architectural competition for the new Edvard Munch Museum. The Fjord City waterfront development plan is organized through an entrepreneurial mode of planning and with clear neoliberal underpinnings. The paper looks at how architectural competitions are used and how they function within the context of contemporary planning.

Introduction

Competitions have been an integral part of architecture on both professional and artistic levels for several centuries (Lipstadt 1989). The popularity of architectural competitions has varied over time, although Europe has recently seen a significant growth in the number of international competitions. The EU/EEA directives on services and public procurement have helped standardize and normalize architectural competitions by incorporating them into existing competitive practices and legal frameworks. According to Lipstadt (2009), this has addressed some of the common concerns architects typically have with competition participation, and has directly contributed to an increase in the number of competitions within the EU/EEA area.

Research on architectural competitions has increased in recent years. Reflecting on this, Andersson et al. (2013, 7) write in the introduction to 'Architectural Competitions – Histories and Practice' that the 'competitions are no longer simply professional praxis for architects and a recurrent exercise for students at schools of architecture. The competition has turned into a field of research'. This research is varied, from studies of national traditions and particularities (Hagelqvist 2010 on Sweden; Kaipiainen 2013 on Finland; Katsakou 2013 on Switzerland; and Sirefman 2015 on America) to studies on the impact of EU directives at the national scale (Paisiou 2012; Van Wezemael 2012; Volker and van Meel 2012) and questions of internationalization (Chupin 2015; Van Wezemael and Silberberger 2015). Much research deals with how the competition process unfolds and how the different actors involved deal with the challenges of their role. Questions often raised in this literature include: interpretation of competition programmes and the different forms of competition (Kazemian 2010;

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Rönn 2009; Zettersten 2010; Leentje Volker 2013), judging and selection procedures (Våland 2009; Svensson 2012, 2013; Strong 2013; Crossman 2015) and how architects work on competition proposals (Kreiner 2010, 2013).

In much of this research, there is an underlying assumption that when executed correctly, the architectural competition is a democratic, transparent and fair process. Chupin, Cucuzzella, and Helal (2015) go so far as to call architectural competitions 'historical democratic devices'. The general belief seems to be that when competitions are working in a fair and transparent way they represent a solid method for finding optimum solutions to complex issues and ensuring architecture of premium quality. While researchers are often critical of the way competitions work and how judgements of quality and distinctions in taste are made and some may even seek to improve upon current modes of competition, there are few signs of challenges to the orthodoxy of the democratic nature of competitions. Tostrup (2010) and Lipstadt (2009) write about how the same assumption about the nature of architectural competitions is widely held within the architectural community. This research challenges this assumption and suggests that there is a need to understand the architectural competition not just in terms of its inner workings, but to engage with questions of how it is situated in a broader socio-political context. This paper is an attempt to start this process of understanding the role the architectural competitions within urban politics. To do so, the study uses the example of the Munch Museum controversy in Oslo and analyzes how architectural competitions are used by different actors. Edvard Munch is considered to be Norway's most important painter, and the only one of true international renown. Upon his death, in accordance with his last will and testament, the municipality of Oslo received his entire collection. How best to honour this legacy was often debated and for a long time dissatisfaction with the current museum was growing. The announcement of plans for a new Munch Museum in Bjørvika, a redevelopment area, on the waterfront still turned out to be controversial.

First, there is an explanation of data collection and methods before the paper moves on to outline an analysis of the Fjord City plan – the overall plan governing the Munch Museum project. It is important to have a good understanding of this plan and what type of urban development strategy it institutes, allowing the competition to be understood as part of a larger protest and not treated as an isolated entity or event. The analysis will then focus on the public debate that arose after the Munch Museum competition to answer the question of how it is used as a urban planning tool.

Data collection

The data and information used in this paper were collected from a number of sources during the winter of 2015/2016 with a supplemental round of data collection done in early July 2016. The main sources of data were local and national newspapers as well as relevant Norwegian Architecture magazines' coverage of the Fjord City and its architectural competitions, collected between 1 January 2000 and 1 July 2016. These documents consist of news items, features, opinion columns, editorials and letters to the editor. Furthermore, print and online planning documents, along with informational materials published by the municipality, were collected. The Munch Museum debate coincided with the rise of social media and with associated changes in media consumption patterns. Social media data have proven difficult to access for social research, with privacy and platform issues complicating the study

of meaningful exchanges on social media platforms. Recently the development of different tools have made data somewhat more accessible, however privacy concerns remain. For this study social media data were gathered from the facebook.com platform using the Netvizz (v1.3) tool. Netvizz extracts content and metrics from groups and pages on facebook. com, making it possible to analyze both content and interaction. The pages and groups used in this study are only among those that are open and that do not require a membership to read, post, comment or 'like' (see Rieder 2013 for Netvizz documentation). Privacy can often be an issue when researching social media, but Netvizz anonymizes user names and because only public pages and open groups are used, the privacy of the Facebook users is not breached. Data from Facebook are not treated as equal to the news items or features that form a record of events. However, it should be noted that the conversations on these Facebook pages are mostly organized around editorials from newspapers that have been shared on the page. Therefore, when analyzing the texts from the Facebook groups they can be seen as an extension of what is going on in the newspaper columns. With the exception of postings regarding a torchlight procession, there is little about the conversation on Facebook that is new, but it does give a sense of which arguments people respond to. Finally, memos written while reviewing two nationally televised debates over the Munch Museum that were broadcast during 2012 were also included in the empirical material. All materials were reviewed and coded using the CAQDAS package NVivo 11.
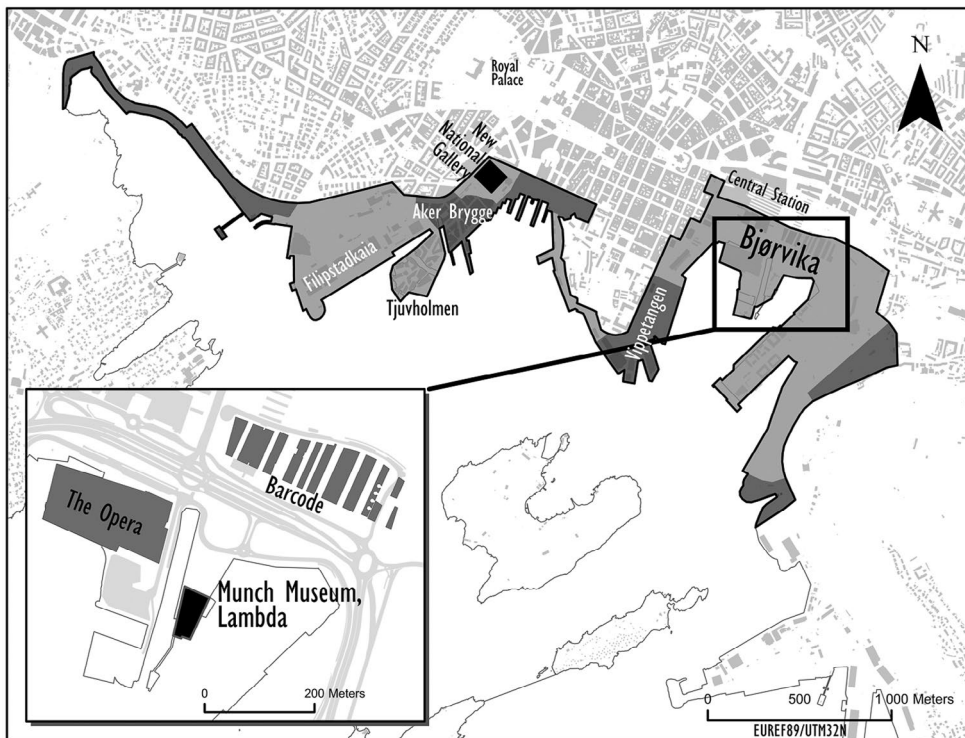
The Fjord City plan

The Fjord City plan is the largest urban waterfront redevelopment scheme in Norwegian history. It includes the entire downtown waterfront and extends far towards the periphery on both the east and west sides of the Oslo fjord (see Figure 1). The idea of the Fjord City was born in the 1980s after Norwegian planners visited a number of waterfront developments, including the Baltimore Harbor project analyzed by David Harvey in his seminal article on the entrepreneurial mode of city governance (Harvey 1989). The real push towards the extension of this strategy to the entire waterfront came after the state decided to place the new national Opera building on a prime piece of real estate in the Bjørvika area (see Figure 1), the largest sub-area in the Fjord City plan, late in 1999. Central to the justification of this level of state spending was urban regeneration and the desire for a national monument (Smith and von Krogh Strand 2010). Hofseth (2008) also notes that the idea of the 'Bilbao Effect' was the central argument for building the Opera. Work on the Fjord City plan started in 2000 and the plan was adopted by the city council in 2008. The Fjord City plan is a general framework for further planning in these areas. It consists of a set of principles for development, some general for the entire planning area and some only for the several different sub-areas that the plan draws up. For each sub-area the plan specifies overall goals of what functions the area should have, such as land use, transportation, parks, housing etc. The Fjord City plan requires a separate more detailed plan to be created and approved for each sub-area. These plans resemble more traditional city plans with associated maps and restrictions on building heights, road width, property divisions etc. The Fjord City plan also mandates what it calls a 'plan- and alternative study' (architecture competitions, parallel assignments etc.) for all 'important questions' (Oslo Municipality 2008).

Analyzing the Fjord City plan (Oslo Municipality 2008) and related documents published in print and online by the municipality, as well as subsequent plans developed within the

Fjord City context, it is very clear that these plans aim to promote the growth of a relatively dense city with functional diversity, high quality retail, services and business. The plan emphasizes attractiveness and technologically driven environmentalism. No theories of urban development, researchers or writers on urbanism are quoted directly; everything is presented as pragmatic arguments based on common knowledge. It draws heavily on the fact that the city is growing, and that according to Statistics Norway (SSB 2016) the city is projected to continue quite robust growth in coming years. More housing must be built to accommodate new inhabitants and more economic growth must be secured, preferably through private investments in technology, innovation and cultural industries and retail. The plan largely seems geared towards creating a safe but vibrant, well off but diverse, ordered but creative type of urban space that the creative class supposedly desire. There is also a clear emphasis on the environmental impact of the plan, mostly through an emphasis on green technology and by being on the cutting edge of this technology (Oslo Municipality 2008). The realization of the Fjord City plan is happening quickly, particularly in the Bjørvika sub-area. Figures 2, 3 and 4 show the development in Bjørvika in 2004, 2008 and 2016, respectively.

Waterfront development

The Fjord City plan follows a now familiar pattern of transformation where areas deemed to have been abandoned or deteriorating as a result of the decline of the industrial city are
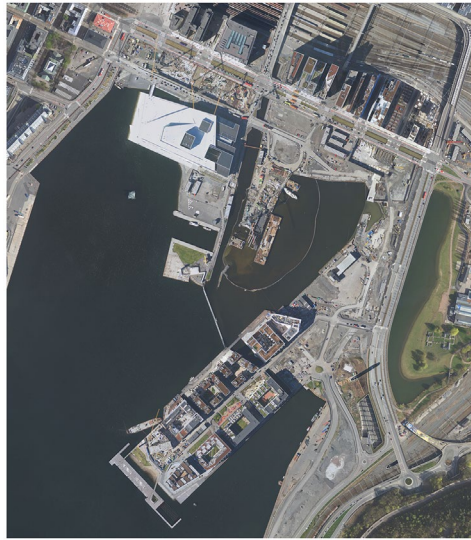

Figure 1. Fjord City Planning Area. Source: Aleksander Bern and Torstein S. Throndsen. Data source: Geovekst / Oslo Municipality.

Figure 2. Orthophoto of Bjørvika, 2004. Data source: Geovekst / Norwegian Mapping Authority.
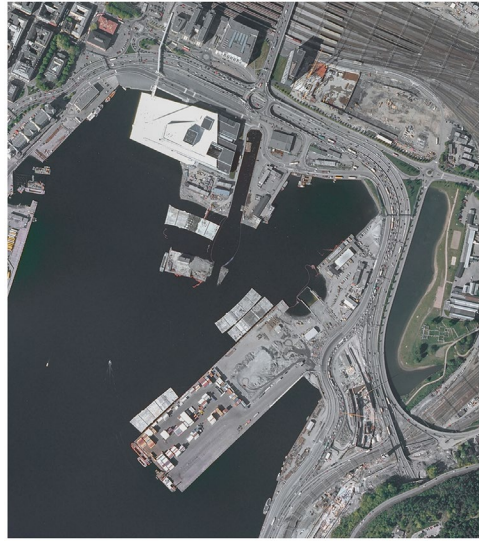
Figure 3. Orthophoto of Bjørvika, 2008. Data source: Geovekst / Norwegian Mapping Authority.

Figure 4. Orthophoto of Bjørvika, 2016. Data source: Geovekst / Norwegian Mapping Authority.

turned into upscale areas for cultural, financial and residential elites (Sandercock and Dovey 2002). The political and financial organization and execution of these transformations is what leads Harvey (1989) to conclude that the mode of urban governance has shifted towards an entrepreneurial mode. The rhetoric supporting this shift significantly emphasizes the competition between cities. Cities compete among each other, just like businesses, but for inhabitants, firms and investments rather than market shares and profits. The turn towards entrepreneurial governance is part of the process of neoliberalization, as Peck (2010) defines

it. We can see the 'roll-back' of government in how municipal governments sell off social housing units at market value, making more and more urban space publicly accessible as opposed to creating genuine public space, and scaled down programmes for youth centres and homeless shelters, for example. The 'roll-out' phase is very visible when the same municipal government gives huge subsidies to for-profit sporting and cultural events and pours millions into waterfront developments, for example. Neoliberalism is therefore not simply deregulation; it is re-regulation. It is a re-regulation towards more market based forms of governance where the government supports and extends markets and commodification based on the belief that the mechanisms of free market competition will most efficiently allocate resources and rewards (Wacquant 2012).

Policies of waterfront development have spread across much of the world and examples can be found on all continents (Breen and Rigby 1996). Perhaps the most famous example is the Guggenheim in Bilbao. The building by Frank Gehry and the renovation of surrounding areas is, according to some researchers, a very successful project boosting economic growth, both locally and city wide, drastically improving the image of the neighbourhood making it attractive to both the capital and tourists. This narrative is sometimes called the 'Bilbao Effect'. Other researchers have contested these results, claiming the effect is much smaller and that in terms of economic growth versus the amount of public capital invested, this hardly justifies the expenditure (the exchange between Gómez and Plaza is an instructive read (Gómez 1998; Plaza 1999, 2006; Gómez and González 2001). Despite debates, there is still a tendency, as Marshall (2007, 5) writes, to view waterfront developments as '… a kind of urban panacea, a cure-all for ailing cities in search of new self-images or ways of dealing with issues of competition for capital developments or tourist dollars'. Research has shown that waterfront developments can challenge and change local planning systems (Desfor and Jørgensen 2004). Waterfront developments tend to build around priorities of elites and participation mechanisms are often not respected, but there are examples of grassroots mobilization that secure modest gains for the socially deprived (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez 2002). These development projects are often organized through public-private partnerships, as is common under a neoliberal mode of governance in general. This provides a way to finance projects that otherwise would be too expensive for the local government, particularly in times of stagnating growth. As Fainstein (2008) notes, this can sometimes provide public benefits such as jobs and affordable housing. However, Fainstein (2008, 783) also finds that because of the risky nature of these projects they '… must primarily be oriented toward profitability, and typically produce a landscape dominated by bulky buildings that do not encourage urbanity, despite the claims of the project's developers'.

The promises of the waterfront development are supported by the notion of the creative city. Richard Florida (2004) argues that cities should develop according to the tastes and politics of the young-adult, middle-class professionals, in order to secure the city's cultural and economic future. According to Florida (2004), the members of this 'creative class' want places that have a rich and dynamic urban culture, with diversity, excitement and nightlife. The city must be attractive, and it must be attractive to the right types of people. This view of urban growth is used to justify the use of public funds and assets in a way that benefits this creative class and gives legitimacy to the roll-out movement of the neoliberal entrepreneurial municipal governance. That the urban development undertaken will lead to innovation in ICT, energy, maritime and cultural industries is in fact the fifth general principle of

the Fjord City plan. The creation of an attractive city is emphasized in many ways, but particularly through high quality architecture.

The Munch Museum

The plan to move the Munch Museum to a new and better building and honour the artist with what was argued to be the most prominent piece of real-estate in all of Oslo (if not the entire country) was announced by the city council leader, Erling Lae, early in the summer of 2008. The plot designated for the new Munch Museum is located close to the Opera in the Bjørvika sub-area of the Fjord City planning area (see Figure 1). The plan for the Bjørvika sub-area predates the adoption of the Fjord City plan by four years, but this change was announced and the competition published before the city council had a chance to approve the needed revisions. This was not a problem according council leader Lae as he had discussed this with the council members and they had all agreed. However, to appease the opposition, HAV Properties (a company owned by the municipality and was in charge of the competition) had to withdraw the competition and a vote was held to approve changes before the competition could be announced again.

An international architecture competition was later held and in the spring of 2009. Spanish architect Juan Herreros was announced as the winner of the competition with his Lambda project (see Figure 5) The Lambda building is a 57.4 metre tall (13 storeys), high-rise tower, measuring 26 metres by 68 metres, resting on a three-storey tall base measuring 53 metres by 92 metres. Herreros has described it as an indoor square and a city observatory connected by a museum (Oslo Municipality 2017).

The competition was actually for more than just the museum. The area between the museum plot and a group of recently built high rises, (the so-called Barcode buildings, see Figure 1) are regulated for housing, a hotel, shopping and services. The competition asked

Figure 5. Rendering of the winning Lambda project. Source: Estudio Herreros/Kultur- og idrettsbygg Oslo KF.

for designs for this as well as outdoor areas between the museum and the water and a municipal services building for heat pumps and water installations. With a few exceptions this seems to be the norm within the Fjord City plan; a competition for one or a few buildings and their connecting urban spaces. In the case of the Munch Museum it may as well have been for just the museum building as the other buildings and urban spaces were largely ignored in the subsequent discussion. The plots for housing, hotels and shopping were sold to a developer and included the rights to these designs. The developers have decided to hire their own architects and are not using the prize-winning designs.

After the competition the project stalled due to the political opposition and, more importantly, because of a veto from the Directorate for Cultural Heritage. (This is similar to the American National Registry of Historic Places and the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England. In Norway, however, this organization has the option to veto any plan adopted by any municipality that in their view threatens any listed building, object or area. If negotiations with municipal government fail, disputes are settled by Ministry of Local Government and Modernization). Negotiations with the Directorate were eventually resolved, but not in time for the 2011 election, after which the political coalition shifted and the majority was no longer in favour of the project. The debate continued until the summer of 2013 when finally a deal was struck with one of the opposition parties, who in return for their support of the Lambda project gained a large list of compensatory policies for the area losing the Munch Museum. Figures 6 and 7 show the building in progress; the main concrete structure is finished so it is now possible to gain a sense of its scale and context.

Figure 6. Lambda under construction. Seen from the west side, next to the Opera on 1 May 2017. Source: Aleksander Bern.

Figure 7. Lambda under construction. Seen from the south side on 1 May 2017. The Barcode buildings are in the background. Source: Aleksander Bern.

Public Private Partnerships

HAV Properties is the central real-estate developer for the Fjord City area. It is a fully owned subsidiary of the Oslo Harbour KF which is owned by Oslo municipality and holds most of the property rights for the Bjørvika sub-area. HAV Properties initiated the architecture competition for the Munch Museum and also creates all plans and submits them to the municipal planning office, just like any other private entity. Usually, once the plans have been approved, HAV Properties will sell the properties to another firm that actually realizes the plans. In Bjørvika this has mostly been Oslo S Development (OSD). The ownership of OSD is split three ways: Entra ASA (a publicly traded real estate company of which the Norwegian state owns 33.4%), Linstow AS (a family owned real estate company) and ROM Eiendom (a subsidiary of NSB, the Norwegian State Railway operator).

Ownership of the urban spaces created in this way is not transferred back to the municipality, but kept by the developer or sold to a company charged with the care and daily maintenance of the area. The actual companies involved vary, but at the start of planning most of the land in the entire area was held by companies fully owned by the municipality. This fragmentation across the different scales and stages of planning creates a fairly complex network of relations. The municipal government will often find themselves on every side of the negotiations in some way, although companies owned by the municipality are controlled at a distance through their own directives and regulations, and they operate as independent companies in their daily activities. This complicated network of ownership, cooperation and control is an institutional reality of the entrepreneurial mode of planning.

In the organization of the Fjord City plan we can clearly see the roll-back/roll-out phases of neoliberalization as described by Peck (2010). Having municipal planners work only on the larger scale and overall framework for the Fjord City plan while all details and concrete solutions are left to companies shows a withdrawal of the municipality from an area where it used to have a much heavier presence. The municipality is also rolling back its engagement in public space by leaving the ownership, construction, planning and maintenance to other entities. At the same time, the municipality controls a significant share in the ownership of all public private partnership companies that are involved in the planning and construction. This apparent paradox is only resolved through the logic of neoliberalization where municipal and state owned companies are re-regulated in order to behave more as if they were private companies and have greater concern for their bottom line than their role in the governance of the city (Wacquant 2012).

The Lambda controversy

The people engaged in this controversy were mostly architects, urbanists, artists or academics, and most of the time they were speaking as private citizens. Politicians representing either the position or opposition in the city's legislature were of course central to the debate. Notably, two NGOs also engaged themselves heavily in the debate — the National Association of Norwegian Architects (NAL), a membership based, politically independent organization working to promote good architecture and architects' shared interests, and the Society for the Welfare of Oslo (SWO), a non-profit organization working to promote good urban planning, urban culture and urban environments. As the identity of Facebook users participating in the debate on those pages were anonymized upon collection, it is difficult to speculate about any of their unifying characteristics. However, from page descriptions it is known who started the pages. These people again fit into one (or more) of the broad categories of architects, urbanists, artists or academics. Some ad hoc organizations also came to life during this controversy, most of them taking a stance either clearly for or clearly against the project. They were private initiatives which used social media and the web to organize themselves. They were short lived, and other than the organization of a single torchlight procession, it is not clear what else they did that separates them from other commentators.

The immediate reception of Lambda was mixed and even its proponents did not really seem that excited. 'It is very easy to dislike', wrote one of its supporters. They seemed more excited about the location of the Munch Museum than they did about the winning proposal.

From this point the debate developed into two opposing positions, those for the winning Lambda project and those against it (pro-Lambda and anti-Lambda). This was often framed more as a question of optimum localization in terms of cost and time rather than quality. Adding to the location controversy is the fact the Munch Museum used to be located in Tøyen, a low status area in the inner east of Oslo. Depriving an already vulnerable neighbourhood of one of its few sources of pride was seen as problematic. On the other hand, it could be argued that an area like this has little use for a high-end art museum and that a more appropriate use of the old building could easily be found. Both the pro- and anti- sides used arguments relating to the architecture competition to support their position. While the anti-Lambda side was quick to react following the competition, the pro-Lambda position was first articulated as simply agreeing with the jury and the city council and refrained from

significant criticism rather than actively arguing for the Lambda project. The explicit and more active pro-Lambda position needed more time to build momentum.

Anti-Lambda

The most immediate criticisms of the Lambda project focused on how the nearly 60 metre-high structure was far too tall and far too big, particularly considering its proximity to the Opera. Many were very critical of the function of the building, and members of SWO argued that having a vertically organized museum with a glass façade made it a poor design for a museum.

One representative of SWO turned the idea of the iconic urban flagship building against itself and wrote:

> From a technical point of view the building is unfit for a museum. The jury did acknowledge some of the flaws but ignored them in the pursuit of the desired iconic and spectacular building.

The anti-Lambda critique is not that the project lacks iconic qualities, but rather that iconicity is privileged over functional concerns. The wish for iconicity, the critics insinuate, is based on the ego and vanity of politicians and architects alike.

Over time, some politicians along with several commenters in both traditional and social media turned to calling the building ugly, and there were several attempts to come up with derogatory nicknames for the building, but no nickname stuck. In a longer comment about the process, the political editor of *Dagbladet*, a major daily paper, arguing against the relocation of the museum finished off with the declarative statement: 'By the way, I find the Lambda building ugly'. The leader of the local Christian Democratic Party, Aud Kvalbein, was quoted in a newspaper as saying: 'The building is nothing but a huge colossus with an angled top. This is not new architecture'. The critique was that this was not particularly ground-breaking architecture and it was argued that Lambda was just another glass and steel high-rise.

As has been seen in numerous other competitions, those opposing the project tried to discredit the jury and their work. In particular, the lack of any representative from the Munch Museum staff was a major point of criticism. Critics used this, along with real-estate costs, to question why the jury selected a high-rise building for a museum, which many critics saw as Lambda's biggest problem. Attacks on the jury and their work are common occurrences in architecture competitions, and the jury members are usually aware of this when they begin their work. This tension can make a jury very concerned about presenting a consensus winner, and the doubts, deliberations and insecurities that may be part of the jury work is not discussed in published judgements (Strong 2013; Svensson 2013; Crossman 2015). Several anti-Lambda commenters felt obligated to reject the criticism of the jurors. The jury did the best they could under challenging circumstances, particularly regarding the low number of competition entries (around 20, of which 8 failed to fill the basic requirements of the room-programme), which was emphasized as something that made the jury's work exceedingly difficult.

The political process of planning and organizing the competition was frequently questioned and became a central point among the arguments for why the architecture competition was invalid and the winner should be discarded. Central to this argument was the fact that HAV Properties filled the role of the client and was responsible for organizing the competition, which many commentators felt was obviously a task for municipal planners.

The competition format was instantly controversial. HAV decided on an invited competition format where they contacted well renowned architects and invited them to participate in the competition. The argument for this organization was that name-brand architects are hesitant to participate under other formats, and when the aim was to achieve a world-class iconic building a so-called 'Starchitect' was needed. (For more on the 'Starchitect' debate see, among others, McNeill 2009; Faulconbridge 2010; Grubbauer 2012). NAL and several others were outraged by this and argued that competitions for this type of project must be in the open format. This, they argued, is crucial to have a transparent and democratic competition process. NAL argues that it opens up for younger and less established architects and increases the probability of having a worthy winner. As the client, it was also up to HAV to select the jury. This leads critics to argue that HAV's obligation towards their profit margin was a deciding factor throughout the process rather than the goal of finding the best solution for the city and for Munch's artwork.

In the competition programme written by HAV, participants were given more freedom in making design proposals than existing planning regulations did. Lambda broke with several existing regulations, most clearly height, but concerns about the ecological footprint of the building were also raised. From HAV and Oslo municipality's point of view, this simply required the re-regulation of the lot in question. To Lambda's critics this invalidated the entire competition, or at least made it possible to abandon the winner and build the second or third ranked project instead. Some took a different stance and argued that since the competition had gone badly there ought to be a new one.

The complicated institutional organization of the Fjord City plan becomes very clear when reading these arguments and their counterarguments. Several commentators seemed to lack an understanding of how the Fjord City development is organized. When politicians tried to answer to this critique they regularly made general statements about the lawfulness of the organization, saying that final planning decisions rest with the city council, rather than explaining how the organization actually works. This gave momentum to those who argued that this process is undemocratic. The more the politicians insisted they followed the law and were being democratic without giving actual detail of how decisions are made, the more fertile the ground became for the accusation of being beholden to selfish ambition and ignoring the popular opinion. On several occasions both sides accused the other of letting political prestige get in the way of any possible compromise

A notable feature of the anti-Lambda side of this debate is the fact that almost no one argued against the use of architectural competitions. The underlying assumption seems to be that this competition did not render a project that should be built. Critics seem to insinuate that if the competition had been open to everyone, if the Oslo planning agency as organizer and client had proceeded in a more orderly democratic fashion and insisted on the parameters in the existing plan, or at least decided on new ones before announcing the competition, the winner would have been both better and less controversial.

Pro-Lambda

This side of the debate was not immediately articulated, but it grew over time. Many commentators arguing the pro-Lambda side said that they were tired of political wavering and the inability to realize the project. Emphasis was often placed on giving Munch and his art the honourable place he deserved as the city's most famous resident and the only Norwegian

painter of truly international renown and significance. In their view, the new Munch Museum became politicized and was taken hostage by politicians more concerned with getting their will than getting anything done. This view of the Munch debate gained followers particularly after the election of 2011 that shifted the balance between the political parties in the Oslo legislature just enough to erode political support for the Lambda project. The majority in the legislature demanded that the city council commission a study of a number of other alternatives and declared Lambda dead shortly after the election. The city council gave in to the demand for a study, but since the majority in the legislature were never able to produce any concrete alternative, the city council continued working towards the realization of Lambda. The study that was commissioned to examine other solutions became instantly controversial. Those that disagreed with its conclusions picked it apart to show how flawed its assessments were. The pro-Lambda camp felt that the report gave an honest assessment when it conceded that while other alternatives were cheaper, Lambda had the greatest potential. The study also stated that Lambda could be realized much sooner than the others. In the end, this study was mostly just something else for the two sides to disagree over.

Time, along with how much money and resources already poured into the Lambda project, became a central argument in the pro-Lambda position. It was argued that far too much time had been taken by Oslo to provide Munch with a museum befitting an artist of his stature, and they feared the alternatives would send the project back into a political limbo that would take several years for it to climb out of. A plan was made, a competition held, land was bought and the design finalized, so rather than waste this effort the building should now be realized.

The pro-Lambda commentators have been split on the question of the process. Some concede many of the anti-Lambda arguments on issues on how the competition and the Fjord City was organized. However, they have argued that these issues should not be held against the Lambda project, its architect, nor the jury. Other people arguing for Lambda have defended the whole organizational structure of the Fjord City development and the Munch process. HAV Properties, they have argued, are under the control of the municipal government and have acted only in accordance with the wishes of the city council.

The pro-Lambda position defended the jury and its ruling. The jury is considered an expert authority that can and must be counted on. The jury makes recommendations based on knowledge about architecture, art, city planning and engineering. Politicians and other non-jury members do not have sufficient expertise and are not in a position to evaluate projects in the same thorough way as a jury. The fact that Lambda was selected by a competent and independent jury is treated as a clear indicator of quality and the critique of the jury and its decision by politicians and others are dismissed. The president of NAL at the time wrote:

> It is very inspiring for architects that the competition projects get so much attention. But urban development plans and architectural competitions are not decided by show of hands at the town square. A huge amount of information is the basis of these decisions. Complex problems and specific demands have been carefully examined by several parties before any decisions are made. This is information you cannot gain an overview of from simply reading the newspaper.

In the Facebook group titled 'Re-LaunchLambda', one user wrote:

> Not only is Lambda obviously a good project – we must put some trust in the art- and architectural knowledge and expertise that chose what really is the winner of a major international competition.

One of the founders of the same Facebook group wrote the following in *Aftenposten*, a major national newspaper:

> Whether we like it or not; a unanimous jury of experts declared Herreros Arquitectos's suggestion Lambda the winner after a large international architectural competitions. Undermining competitions in this way is both serious and embarrassing. … Subjective evaluations are not something in which politicians should engage. Not everyone gets to be a judge.

While anti-Lambda commentators often argued for a new and better executed competition, the pro-Lambda writers argued that there were no guarantees that a new competition would not be equally controversial. Competitions generally do not result in universally praised projects and all competition winners have been subject to criticism; not everyone can be equally satisfied.

One of the most repeated arguments of the pro-Lambda position has been that it would embarrass the city of Oslo within the international architecture community if it did not build this project. On a number of previous occasions Oslo has decided to scrap winning projects and not build anything at all or hold a new competition several years later. This has a cost, pro-Lambda writers have argued, and Oslo will end up ruining its reputation among architects. If Oslo continues to do this the best architects will refuse to participate in future competitions. The cost of competing is already perceived to be problematic as architects put a lot of time into their competition entries without any compensation – unless they win. Sometimes winning gives a monetary prize, but the real money is in the actual contract. Holding an international architecture competition carries with it an obligation to actually realize the winner. 'Creating a new competition would be a huge embarrassment', said the rector of the Oslo School of Architecture and Design in a newspaper interview, before adding:

> Oslo is starting to get a bad reputation, we know this. If this competition is re-launched it will be very dramatic. We would very likely end up looking ridiculous.

People engaged in the debate from a pro-Lambda position were very upset about the apparent lack of respect for architecture and architects in some of the commentaries from the anti-Lambda side. Politicians arguing the anti-Lambda case are often accused of not listening to the professionals, the architects and planners that have expertise and knowledge the politicians themselves lack. A professor of architecture at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design wrote it plainly: 'Politicians must show respect for the discipline of architecture or the development of Oslo's waterfront will fail'.

The pro-Lambda peak

In the last few months of 2012, after the opposition had received their new study of alternatives, the pro-Lambda position mobilized. Using Twitter and Facebook they organized a torchlight procession through downtown areas of Oslo. A torchlight procession is not an unusual event in Norway – it is a common way of organizing a peaceful protest. Usually reserved for bigger causes such as anti-war demonstrations, or for protesting human rights abuses, it is the protest form of choice for the liberal left middle class. In this case the list of organizers and supporters reads as a 'who's who' of Oslo: museum directors, leading architects, musicians, artists, authors and academics. Some culturally inclined investors also joined in, one of whom remarked to a reporter that this was his first ever torchlight procession. When asked about why he wanted Lambda he replied 'It won the competition so it should

be built here'. Approximately 1000 people attended according to media reports. The momentum did not last and after this debates were far less frequent on both sides of the issue. The following spring a deal was struck. The socialist party agreed to support the Lambda project in exchange for a comprehensive area-based development programme for the area where the old Munch museum stood. After the 2013 election was won by the opposition parties, a few people argued that Lambda should be stopped, but they received little support. At the time of writing, the main loadbearing, concrete tower has been finished and the museum is scheduled to open in 2020.

Conclusion

The analysis shows that almost everyone considers that an architecture competition is an appropriate and good method of making a design selection. The simple fact that the Lambda project won the competition was, even to many who opposed the project, a validation of its quality as good architecture. Some people who themselves dislike the building design would defer to the competition process and the jury and hold the work to be of high quality, but just not to their liking.

Politicians and the pro-Lambda commentators used the architecture competition as a way to deny and undermine other alternatives raised during the process. They used the competition to argue that other alternatives presented were excessively late and that they had little legitimacy. Alternatives presented after the competition can easily be dismissed. Because they did not go through the same rigorous quality control and scrutiny of a competition jury they are automatically invalidated.

The competition creates pressure to have its winner realized. When what is being challenged is in reality a prior question to the competition (in this case where the new museum should be located), the architectural competition becomes a powerful tool to dismiss and move past such challenges. Many architects did not particularly want the Lambda building and were happy having the Munch Museum where it was; however, their loyalty to competitions as central to their profession made opposing the project difficult.

When viewed in the context of this neoliberal entrepreneurial planning process it becomes clear that the competition offers no democratic opening in a system that already has democratic deficits. The democracy of the competition is at best a democracy exclusively among architects. While the architectural competition pre-dates the entrepreneurial mode of urban governance, by many decades, architectural competitions fit very well into this system where creating an attractive city for the creative classes and other elites is the goal of planning. The use of architectural competitions promises the type of prestigious architecture and attractive urbanism that the Fjord City plan aims for. The analysis shows how architectural competitions are used as a quality measure for city planning. One side of the debate wants a different plan altogether, while the architectural competition has already given the winner status as good architecture and by extension good urban planning.

Disclosure statement

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