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Judging Architecture

The struggle to find winning design proposals

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Abstract

This article critically reflects on how qualified jurors succeeded in identifying winning design proposals during two design developer competitions. Following the close reading and coding of transcribed field notes from jury room deliberations, a judging theory is suggested. The proposed judging model may be of general interest for jury work in architecture and urban design competitions. The underlying concept for this judging theory is that professionals who make qualified assessments must complete critical ethical steps, which are influenced by (a) context and policy, (b) design proposals for competition sites, (c) judging process and competition criteria, and (d) selecting winners and producing the related jury reports. This theory describes and explains how professionals may act in fulfilling their assignment to find a winner.

Introduction

This article presents findings from a study conducted in the jury rooms of two Swedish design developer competitions organised by Norrköping municipality in 2022. With 145,000 inhabitants, Norrköping's growing population is driving the municipality's plans for new housing. Hence, invited and open design developer competitions were conducted in Norrköping as part of a research and development (R&D) project financed by Vinnova in search of future-oriented design solutions to meet tomorrow's housing challenges. Four design teams were selected for the invited competition based on pre-qualification criteria, while six design teams participated in the open competition. Taken together, the jurors had to evaluate 10 proposals and single out the winners for each competition. This article focuses on how the jury members examined the design proposals in both competitions, ranked their qualities, weighed the competition programme criteria and legitimised the results in their jury reports.

This R&D project was a joint venture between a public authority (i.e. Norrköping municipality), which was also the competition organiser, academia (research support was provided by Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg and the University of Halmstad, Halmstad) and the private sector (i.e. the 10 design teams composed of architects, engineers and developers or builders producing design proposals). The global objective of the R&D project was to promote innovative submissions for flexible apartments and affordable housing, including plus-energy solutions that could reduce CO_2 circularity. The organiser collaborated with Chalmers University of Technology, Halmstad University and Swedish Architects (a professional association for architects and urban designers) in planning the invited and open competition programmes. Swedish Architects approved the design of the

two programmes and their conditions. Hence, the two competitions can be seen as combining professional practice with research expertise from scholars who specialise in competitions, housing and construction management. The three authors in the research group (i.e. Rönn, Koch and Braide) were actively involved in developing objectives, assessment criteria and delivery demands for both competitions, in addition to producing appendices and templates for designing housing, managing CO_2 emissions, energy, carbon circularity and innovation.

As the public organiser of the design developer competitions, Norrköping municipality seeks innovative design solutions for flexible apartments and affordable housing, including plus-energy solutions, strong reductions in CO_2 emissions and carbon circularity. This is a complex task in terms of socio-ecological sustainability, which is one of the major reasons behind the search for multidisciplinary design teams that can identify good solutions to 'wicked' design problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973). In their extensive investigation, Malmqvist et al. (2021) find that the average level of CO_2 emissions for the construction of multifamily residential buildings in Sweden was 318 kg CO_2e/sqm gross floor area (GFA). Both competitions (i.e. Modules A1–A5) set the objective of a 40% reduction in CO_2, which translates to a maximum CO_2 emission of 191 kg CO_2e/sqm GFA. This R&D project also addressed the need for flexible apartments (Braide, 2023) and socially sustainable housing (Braide, 2019). Constructing flexible apartments is a design strategy in response to meeting households' needs for families that may grow or shrink over time.

Objectives and questions

This article expands our knowledge of how juries in design developer competitions identify winning solutions. In particular, this article describes how jurors understand, theorise and critically reflect on design proposals. The following four research questions are investigated:

- How have jurors ranked design proposals in relation to the competition objectives, judging criteria and assessment materials?
- What kind of values, qualities and shortcomings in the design proposals were identified, reviewed or compared by the jurors?
- How was the judging organised? Which critical steps can be seen when the jurors single out overall winning solutions that meet the design objective?
- How were the jurors motivated to identify the winning designs and legitimise their final judgement in public jury reports?

Methods

This case study investigates two design developer competitions, which must be understood in both their local context (Groat & Wang, 2002) and the more general understanding of architecture, construction and urban design contests (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Geertz, 2008). The jury work is presented as a thick description to maximise learning (Stake, 2000). With reference to Cross (2025), the research methods can be described as follows:

- ***Jury work field notes and observations:*** The research group attended all meetings to observe the jury room deliberations, which were documented through extensive field notes. These protocols are important for researchers' understanding of the jurors' evaluation process. The jury held four and five meetings for the invited and open competitions, respectively, to examine the design proposals, identify the winning designs and agree on the wording of their jury reports.

- ***Using action research methods to observe the competitions:*** The research group's active involvement in both competitions can be seen as representing both engaged scholarship (Van de Ven, 2007) and action research approaches (Carlsson & Koch, 2014). Active participation requires finding the balance between engaging with field actors and keeping an objective distance from the research subjects, critically reflecting on the findings and maintaining awareness of the researchers' role in the R&D project when findings are identified and results presented.

- ***Evaluating the competition format:*** The research group evaluated the design developer competitions as a municipal tool for promoting innovative thinking and supporting creative solutions to meet housing needs. When seen from the competitors' perspectives, the competitions in Norrköping municipality operate as both a professional laboratory and experimental arena for generating innovative ideas. Hence, the organiser provides both challenging tasks and a professional jury to evaluate the generated design solutions.

- ***Reflections theorising the judging of design proposals:*** The collected data were used to describe jurors' assessment of design proposals by following the necessary steps to credibly select winners. The jurors must identify and reinforce differences in the presented solutions in relation to the competition task. Jurors must compare and rank the designs, perceive the value of the contributions and justify their choice of winners in public statements. The competing design teams, colleagues and politicians in Norrköping municipality must accept the winning design.

Data

The collected data primarily included Norrköping municipality documents, competition documents, interviews with professionals on the winning design teams, field notes and observations from the jury deliberations and website information. The competition documents included competition programmes and appendices, 10 design proposals, jury reports and expert evaluations regarding plus-energy solutions and carbon emissions. The design proposals were presented as drawings, illustrations, schema, digital models and texts describing the design ideas.

Local guidelines

The Norrköping municipality operated both local design developer competitions. In particular, the competition format was not included in the 2016 Public Procurement Act. Unlike architectural competitions, there were no national competition rules or approved standards for competitors. In this case, the local competition programmes set the objectives for steering design, judging criteria and delivery requirements. Complementary documents governing the jurors' evaluations include: *Detailed development plans for competition sites* (*Detaljplaner för tävlingstomterna*), *Guidelines for municipal land allocation in Norrköping municipality* (*Riktlinjer för kommunala markanvisningar i Norrköpings kommun*) (Stadsbyggnadskontoret, 2015), *Action plan for land allocation for housing construction* (*Handlingsplan för marktilldelning vid bostadsbyggande*) (Stadsplanenämnden, 2018), and *Architecture city Norrköping* (*Arkitekturstaden Norrköping*) (Norrköping Municipality, 2018).

First-hand data

The field notes and observations from the jury deliberations were the most important data, illustrating the jurors' first-hand experience in judging design proposals, showing how their jury work was conducted and simultaneously informing the process by which the jurors identified winners. Altogether, the jurors held four and five meetings for the invited and open competitions, respectively, which were held to carefully go through the competing proposals, single out the winning designs and finally agree on the wording of the jury reports.

Competition theory and literature review

Design developer competitions are situated between architectural and design-and-build competitions. The lack of standardisation in design developer competitions is a significant difference compared with architectural competitions governed by international, European or national rules. This competition format follows the liberal international order in which companies compete for building contracts and land speculation according to publicly known

rules, where jurors judge and announce successful design proposals. Design teams regularly submit design proposals to these competitions. The rules for these professional architectural competitions were developed in the 19th century in England, France, Germany, Austria and America (Tostrup, 1999). The literature on architectural competitions can be divided into two overarching themes: (a) perspectives from architectural history and (b) contemporary phenomena in modern society. The academic literature on architecture and urban design competitions was developed following scientific conferences and research projects presented in anthologies, theses and articles (Anderson et al., 2016). Important conferences focusing on architectural competitions have been held in Princeton (2005), Stockholm (2008), Copenhagen (2010), Montreal (2012), Helsinki (2012), Delft (2014), Leeds (2016), Amsterdam (2017), Vilnius (2018) and Chęciny (2018). Several scientific journals have published thematic issues on architecture and urban design competitions, including *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* (No. 1990-2), *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* (No. 2010-2/3 and No. 2012-1), *Scandinavian Journal of Management* (No. 2011-1), *Geographic Helvetia* (No. 2011-2) and *FormAkademisk* (No. 2013-4 and No. 2014-1).

Notably, a new research field is emerging following an increasing number of scientific articles on architectural competitions in the academic literature. For example, Laryea and Watermeyer (2021) identify 359 related articles in the Scopus database and could have found many more scientific articles by searching other databases. Nevertheless, few studies have examined jury work and design reviews to obtain the best sustainable solutions (Cucuzzella, 2020; Goubran, 2021). For example, Houck (2016) investigates assessments and school competitions with a particular focus on universal design using analyses of jury reports. According to Chupin (2011), competition judging can be seen as focusing on design questions, while jurors' comments are consequently a re-design question. Architectural critiques are probably a much better way to show how professionals evaluate design proposals (Attoe, 1978; Lundequist, 2002; Lymer, 2010). Architectural critiques may be observed in competitions as: (a) comments from colleagues designing solutions in architectural offices, (b) jurors' work methods for judging design proposals and (c) written statements in jury reports. Architectural students are also trained to present design projects and review design proposals using architectural critiques (Murphy et al., 2012; Oh et al., 2013).

A handful of articles have shown how juries review design proposals. For example, some studies examined juries' evaluations during dialogue competitions, where the competitors present drafts and discuss their design ideas with the jurors during face-to-face sessions (Cucuzzella, 2011; Jacobsen & Kamstrup, 2017; Kreiner, 2010, 2012; Kreiner et al., 2011; Lans & Volker, 2008; Menon & Vanderburg, 2014; Meyer, 2016; Silberberger, 2011). However, the conditions for evaluating draft proposals during dialogue competitions differ from those

for judging anonymised proposals. Anonymised entries were required in the two competitions operated by the Norrköping municipality; hence, the competitors' solution designs became a kind of 'shadow dancing' with an absent partner (Kreiner, 2013). The idea behind competitors' anonymity during competitions, which is a common demand in competition rules and briefs, is that jurors can evaluate entries without bias toward competitors. Hence, anonymised proposals are assumed to promote equal terms and fair play, especially to protect smaller, less well-known participants. Juries are obligated to identify and review high-quality designs without considering their prior knowledge about the design teams.

Östman (2012) reports on jury work during an ideas competition in Finland, which included four design proposals. The objective of this publicly organised competition was to find designs for a county centre. As a member of the jury, Östman kept field notes during the jurors' evaluations. In this competition, the jury consisted of 12 individuals, including five politicians, four leading county officials and three external professional jurors, among whom one represented the Finnish Association of Architects (*Suomen Arkkitehtiliitto*). According to Östman, the process for judging proposals in competitions approved by the Finnish Association of Architects is kept secret from outsiders; hence, few studies have been conducted on Finnish jury deliberations. Kreiner (2020) concludes that jury work during competitions is one of their best-kept secrets: 'Juries are seldom accessible for observation, and many jury members appear surprisingly unaware of the intricacies of assessing the competing design proposals' (p. 31). Similarly, Östman (2012) notes that the jurors' evaluation started with formal introductions, including short presentations, followed by examining the contributions. During the second meeting, one of the professional jurors pointed out a proposal as being inadequate within the needs of the urban structure at the site: 'Suddenly, we all saw and accepted this conclusion' (p. 132). Östman (2012) finds that this was the first strong statement in a series of judgements during the evaluation process that were not clearly recorded in the minutes of the meeting. In the third session, the chairperson wanted the jury to single out a winner. This meeting began by discussing the difficulties in identifying the best design solution. Even if the assessments were clearly constructive, the jurors' struggles in finding a winner became complicated. In contrast to the other jurors, Östman (2012) concludes 'that the two of the lay jurors and I as a professional juror favoured' (p. 138) one solution, but the jurors did not demonstrate strong antagonism in expressing their differing opinions. Nevertheless, the professional jurors could not bridge this conflict during the jury deliberations; hence, they decided to select two entries as joint winners, which is seldom the case in design competitions and can be seen as a failure of the competition (Rönn, 2019). This breakdown can happen during ideas competitions because the criteria outlined in the organisers' competition programme do not promise that any

assignments will be implemented, according to competition rules approved by Nordic architectural associations.

In two case studies, Svensson (2009, 2012) investigates jurors' evaluation of contributions in two Swedish architectural competitions. The first case study was an invited competition, including four entries by competitors who were selected after a pre-qualification process. The objective was to rebuild a school building with space for extensions. The nine jury members comprised two architects, three local politicians, two teachers and two directors from the municipality. In this case, public opinion influenced the jurors' evaluation of design proposals during deliberations (Svensson, 2009). Svensson (2009) identifies two separate judging and decision-making strategies among the jurors: that is, evaluation through architectural critique (Attoe, 1978) versus ranking by transformed qualities, summarising numbers and differentiating values using decision-making criteria (Bazerman & Moore, 2008). The architects and design laypeople shared different opinions about the design proposals in the jury room; however, the jury singled out a winner after three meetings. In this case, financial issues and the need for a qualified architect who was willing to co-operate became crucial in identifying the best proposal.

In the second case study, Svensson (2012) examines how the jury singled out a winner in an open architectural competition following their deliberations inside the jury room. The organiser of this competition was looking for a cultural building design suitable for an annual song festival in the municipality. The jury had to find a winning design proposal among 94 entries, which were categorised using design principles to make the jurors' evaluation easier. The eight jurors comprised four architects, including the city architect, two local politicians and two professionals who represented the music curators for the festival. Swedish Architects' jury secretary acted as a counsellor in the jurors' evaluation process. The first 2-day meeting began with a discussion of how the 94 proposals could be sorted for judging in sense-making steps. The 94 entries were reduced to 47 in this step. The next step reduced these 47 entries to 15 robust design proposals. The jurors studied these 15 entries in more detail. In the following session, each juror had to pick five favourites. However, no obvious best solution was identified and a negative attitude spread among the jurors. The final jury meeting began uncertainly as one juror began the review by placing scale models of the 15 proposed buildings one by one into a large model of the competition area in the town. A new visual opening appeared and Svensson (2012) observes the jurors' renewed enthusiasm, as they all saw that one of the design proposals fit best on the competition site. Hence, the visual appeal of the submission became convincing and bridged the differences in opinion between architects and laypeople. During the previous meeting, the laypeople preferred a design with the visual appearance of a guitar, which was easy to understand, but the architects disliked this design and favoured another solution, which had a complex

design with a modernist expression of vertical strips and glass in the facade. These two entries represent quite distinct types of architectural rhetoric. However, the visual power of the winning submission, as shown by its physical model in situ, became obvious. Svensson (2012) concludes that the jurors found the winner by simply looking at the model in place.

Interestingly, the reported jury work by Östman (2012) and Svensson (2009, 2012) both exhibit exceptions in terms of their competition formats and tasks, in addition to the number of submissions to be judged. Hence, these studies differ from our research on two design developer competitions organised by Norrköping municipality. In general, open architectural competitions in Finland may attract between 30 and 250 proposals (Kazemian et al., 2007). To the best of our knowledge, the need to single out a winner from among 94 submissions has never happened in a design developer competition. In Sweden, this competition format seldom exceeds 20 contributions. These study findings are therefore limited and underline a knowledge gap in the research literature. Hence, how judging theory and practice are expressed during jury deliberations when judging design proposals requires further scientific investigation.

Two case studies

In Norrköping municipality's invited and open competitions, the jurors assessed 10 design proposals. In the first case study, four submissions were made in the invited competition, where only rental housing was required for an outer-city site. The price of the land was 3,500 SEK sqm/residential floor area (RFA). This outer city neighbourhood consists of a preschool, playground, detached houses and semi-detached houses. This competition required a detailed open plan for the construction of housing with three floors. In the second case study, six design proposals for a central city site were submitted to the open competition. This plot is part of a large transformation of the port into a new city district. The price of the land is 4,800 SEK sqm/RFA. The detailed development plan stipulated that this land must be used for housing with ground-floor businesses. Dwellings may be built on seven floors. The form of lease is open in the competition program. The detail development plan has a lot of specific regulations guiding the design and the use of the site. In addition, there is a special aesthetic program developed for the transformation of the district to be applied in the competition.

Both competition programs have five appendices to support the production of design solutions: 1) Design strategy for flexibility in housing; 2) Template for energy management informing how energy should be reported; 3) Climate declaration template describing how CO_2 emissions should be reported; 4) Template describing carbon circularity in architecture

and construction; and finally; 5) Template describing how innovation can be understood in design developer competitions.

Jury and assessment criteria

The seven jurors for each of the two design developer competitions comprised five people appointed by the municipality and two external members chosen by the research group. Five of the seven jurors were professional architects, and one had a PhD in architecture. These jurors were supported by external experts on climate impacts and energy issues. The jurors were required to consider eight criteria of equal importance when judging the design proposals:

- Architectural quality.
- Energy use.
- Climate footprint.
- Circular processes.
- Social sustainability.
- Affordability/cost.
- Innovation.
- Developability.

The measurable criteria for energy use, climate footprint and affordability can be quantified. Norrköping municipality's land allocation policy recommends assessment criteria for competitions, which can be transformed into control and monitoring requirements in land allocation agreements. However, the other five criteria have soft characteristics; that is, they are subjective, which is typical in architectural and urban design competitions. While assessing the contributions, the jurors must interpret and clarify these soft criteria, in addition to following them up in dialogues with the winning teams.

Submission requirements

The design proposals must be anonymously presented on five A1 posters with the following requirements:

- Site plan at 1:400 scale, showing the building design in situ, including a surrounding landscape design.

- One perspective shows the design proposal and its surrounding context.
- One perspective showing the courtyard design.
- Two sections at 1:400 scale show the residential buildings and outdoor landscape.
- Complete facade drawing at 1:400 scale, indicating materials and colours.
- Drawings at 1:50 scale showing material transitions, eaves, balconies, windows and entrances.
- Apartment layouts at 1:200 scale that can vary in size to accommodate different household sizes, with one solution furnished.
- Digital building models.
- A brief description of the fundamental concepts underlying the architectural qualities, design strategies, energy management, carbon circularity, innovations and construction methods.
- Appendix 1: A summary of energy management according to the template provided.
- Appendix 2: A climate declaration that reports the CO_2 emissions according to the template provided.
- Appendix 3: A report on the number of apartments and rental costs.

Two external experts evaluated the competing design teams' energy solutions and climate declarations and reported their findings to the jurors using written statements.

Case study 1: The invited competition

In the first case study, the jury needed four meetings to find a winner among the design proposals. Two face-to-face meetings, one online meeting, and one hybrid meeting with jurors, both 'in situ' and online were conducted. The jurors' evaluation of submissions began with a 2-day meeting on the 4th of October 2022. The jury administrator handed out a template for a scoring tool that described the scoring criteria, which was intended to support the jurors in ranking the proposals. The administrator also presented a general overview of the future of the competition site, including the planning context. The jurors introduced themselves and the researchers' observer role was clarified. After this introduction, the evaluation began with a presentation of the four invited design solutions,

which were subsequently discussed in 12 separate rounds in four meetings before presenting the winner in their jury report (Figure 1).

Figure 1

The winning design by Spridd, Nivå landskapsarkitektur, Incoord and Kvarnstaden in the invited competition.



Case study 2: The open competition

In the second case study, the jury needed five meetings to find a winner among six design proposals. Three face-to-face meetings and two online meetings were conducted. The jurors began evaluating submissions with a 2-day meeting on the 7th of December 2022. The seven-member jury had the same structure in the open competition as in the invited competition. However, the people involved were not the same, as the organiser had appointed a new competition administrator. In addition, the research group selected two new external jurors to participate in jury work. Following the presentation of the involved individuals and a brief introduction of the competition, the jurors discussed how to organise jury work. After evaluating entries in 12 separate rounds during the five jury meetings, the winner was announced in a jury report (Figure 2).

Figure 2

The winning design by Kaminsky Architecture, Mareld landskaparkitektur, Preservia, Kian Property and Moelven Byggmodul in the open competition.



Understanding jury work

Formulating a judging theory to explain the study findings requires creating a model that illustrates how juries single out winners in design developer competitions. Even if this model is based on data from only two case studies, this suggested theory for judging submissions is hopefully of general importance and shows the crucial steps when evaluating design proposals in architectural and urban design competitions. The idea is that professionals making qualified assessments must complete certain steps regardless of whether the steps are articulated, clearly expressed, embedded in evaluation processes or hidden in statements. In particular, jury work has been connected to a strong ethical framework established by Swedish Architects to guide professional architects acting as jurors. Swedish Architects (2024) adopted an ethical code of conduct for professional architects (*Etiskt program och etiska regler*), which addresses architects' role, assignments, copyright and relationships with their colleagues. For example, *'*criticism of a colleague's work should be objective and well-founded. The architect should not discredit another colleague's person or work through unfair public criticism*'* (Swedish Architects, n.d, 2021, 2024).

Four jury work categories encompass jurors' review of design proposals, including specific steps that influenced their judgements in both competitions: (a) context and policy, (b) design proposals and the competition sites, (c) judging and (d) detailed development plans. The jurors took this guidance for granted because the competition sites were located on plots with detailed development plans that were already regulated by the municipality. The invited and open competition formats had no major impact on jury work due ;to the small

difference in the number of contributions. The organiser selected the competition sites based on their degree of exploitation, design elements and land use for housing and businesses. These prerequisites had a direct impact on the jurors' assessments in terms of how well the proposals fit with the competition sites. Especially in the open competition, the jurors had to review the organiser's detailed rules to ensure that the entries met the requirements. Judging how submissions meet the requirements of detailed development plans depends on the regulation, its objectives and its clarity. Location characteristics are another typical precondition governing competition sites.

On one hand, the invited competition was situated in an outer city location surrounded by nature and remote buildings, with a preschool constructed on a neighbouring property. Hence, families were a suitable target group for this competition. The qualities and possibilities of the competition site were developed by the design team and acknowledged by the jurors, who also visited the plot to obtain a better understanding of how the competing design proposals considered the site characteristics. On the other hand, the open competition was situated in a central city plot as part of the establishment of a new district, which is of great political interest. The winning design included a large number of small apartments for single-person households. The jury justified their winning choice based on their assumption that the design context is intended to produce larger apartments for Sweden's prosperous middle class. Hence, the winning design would contribute to increasing diversity in the new district. In this case, the plot must enable both housing and ground-floor businesses. The exploitation of this site was made possible by the relocation of port operations. New dwellings will surround the competition site; therefore, the winning design should adapt the site based on documents describing how the area should appear in the future. Thus, the differences between detailed development plans and plots strongly affected the jurors' evaluations of design proposals. In this way, both the local context and municipal policy mattered in design developer competitions, as they produced different conditions for the jury work in the two competitions organised by the Norrköping municipality.

As practicing architects and researchers, the jurors appointed by the research group are competent, experienced professionals who accepted this assignment without hesitation. In addition, the jurors were supported by external experts who evaluated the related energy solutions and climate declarations in the proposed designs. Similarly, the jurors appointed by the organiser include experts in architecture and urban design, land surveying and energy. As politicians employ these individuals to work for the municipality, these jurors can be assumed to have a strong understanding of the municipal processes that competition entries must support. Interestingly, the jurors reflect the division of competence and power between politicians and civil servants in design developer competitions. That is, there is a

clear separation of roles, missions and decision-making practices in the land allocation policy. In particular, no Norrköping politicians acted as jurors to bridge this competency gap, although this was observed elsewhere (Rönn & Koch, 2022). While Norrköping municipality officials appoint the winners, the jury reports observe that politicians make decisions about land allocations in Norrköping. However, these ethical considerations in design developer competitions can be summarised as 'fair play', as the idea of fairness is a fundamental principle in design developer competitions, although there are no specific rules or national standards for these competitions. Lampel et al. (2012, p. 76) emphasise this crucial sense of fair play:

> At the heart of the competition is the assurance to participants that all performances will be judged impartially, without allowing competitors' previous reputation or economic clout to influence assessment. This means creating a governance structure where rules are fair and unambiguous, and communicating this governance structure as clearly as possible.

Design proposals for competition sites

By nature, architectural designs are future-oriented (Cross, 2025; Lundequist, 1992). In design developer competitions, both juries and design teams produce knowledge and provide possibilities. In particular, the jury determines future architectural knowledge through their design reviews and selection of winners, while the design team creates knowledge about the future by finding solutions that meet the competition criteria. Their submissions represent future possibilities, such as models showing what the built environment could look like at the competition site if the designs were already constructed (Rönn, 1995). Therefore, professional jurors mentally enter the proposed models and partly experience them as built environments. However, design proposals do not reveal scientific facts because they are simple models illustrating the possibilities for competition sites. To the best of their ability, the jurors must formulate well-informed judgements about the proposed solutions, which can be seen as excellent, appropriate or unclear. Lehtonen (1991) investigates the relationship between architecture as a model and the built environment and finds that illustrations are not considered real but fictional. Nevertheless, professional jurors can read proposals and make credible assumptions about how the built environment can be experienced. Hence, Lehtonen (1991) claims that competent jurors can make qualified judgements in design developer competitions. The prerequisite for jurors' credible predictions is that the proposed models must provide a sufficiently qualified picture of the future site, which provides the background rationale for the submission requirements in the competition programmes, such as illustrations (e.g. site plans, sections, facades, details or apartment layouts), perspectives and digital models.

The winning proposals in both competitions must consider quite different target groups for housing. On the one hand, the winning design in the invited competition presented flexible apartments to meet families' household needs, which vary over time. Hence, the winning design proposal described both physical structures and apartments that facilitate these family transformations. The proposed designs were oriented towards meeting families' needs, which the jurors considered appropriate due to the location of a preschool and playground near the competition site. On the other hand, the open competition described no clear target group in its programme criteria. Therefore, the jurors found it more difficult to assess how the six proposed housing units were most appropriate for the competition site. The winning entry combined a large number of small apartments with communal spaces for social activities; however, this design was at risk of being perceived as a hotel rather than providing homes for family life.

Hence, flexibility in apartment design can be expressed in three ways: (a) through visualising small apartments with varied types of furnishing and use of living spaces, (b) through ground-floor residences that integrate living and business spaces and (c) through basement garages that can be converted to other uses and can be accessed from the yard. Hence, the winning proposal would contribute to increasing the diversity of people living in the new district, as the designed small homes should attract single-person households and young people looking for a central location to live in, particularly since the nearby housing in the new district comprises larger apartments for an established middle class. The degree of precision and freedom in the competition programmes, the location characteristics of the sites and external conditions influenced the jurors' assessment of design proposals in both competitions. In addition, the jurors must interpret the judging criteria based on the local context, as Svensson (2008) similarly observes. The design proposals visualise new dimensions in the competition task. By reviewing the proposed solutions, the jurors expand their own understanding of the task.

Judging processes and competition programmes

In both competitions, the design review began without selecting a chair, rapporteur or secretary for the jury report, but these roles were clarified through praxis, as one of the jurors appointed by the organiser acted as session leader and finalised the jury report. From this perspective, the evaluation structure differed from Swedish Architects' guidelines and may have caused some confusion at the beginning of the judging process. In addition, the presence of researchers inside the jury room also differed from Swedish Architects' guidelines. Thus, the competitions could be understood as based on an informal ethical agreement between the organiser, jurors and design teams. Based on the jurors' evaluation

of the design proposals, eight typical steps for identifying competition winners can be conceptualised as follows:

- **Step 1:** *A positive atmosphere.* The jurors began their review by absorbing the design proposals and judging criteria and planning their evaluation. The jurors reflected on the hard versus soft criteria operating in the competition programmes. For example, energy use, climate footprint and affordability/cost are quantifiable criteria that appear as 'hard facts', which is consistent with research regarding the use of soft and hard data in planning (Sällström, 1980). In contrast, architectural quality, circular processes, social sustainability, innovation and developability are soft criteria because they are subjective. Nevertheless, both kinds of criteria are assessable and must be interpreted simultaneously when judging design proposals. The jurors experienced a sense of curiosity and excitement, as they and the organiser were no longer 'shadow dancing' (Kreiner, 2013) with absent partners, although the participating competitors were still anonymous. In this way, the jurors began interacting with the design proposals as if they were dance partners with the anonymous design teams and began to indirectly communicate with them by asking questions about the design proposals and receiving responses.

- **Step 2:** *External conditions influence jurors' evaluation of proposals.* Two facets of these external impacts can be observed during both competitions. First, municipal plans for new buildings on the competition plots influenced the jurors' assessments in terms of the values and qualities that the competing design proposals could be assumed to bring to the sites, as the entries could not be seen as individual objects separate from the sites and their surrounding environment. Second, the jurors' assessments may also be influenced by technical experts with access to measurable systems. For example, the strong demand for energy solutions and the need to minimise CO_2 emissions were important considerations in both design developer competitions. Considering Canadian competitions, Cucuzzella (2016) observes that risk management tools, such as environmental certification, appear to be attractive through their predictive power, as the outcomes are regarded as 'hard' facts. Therefore, Cucuzzella (2016) suggests that technical experts should be kept external to jury deliberations and should provide technical reports to the jurors during their assessment of design proposals. After studying a Finnish competition with strong sustainability requirements, Östman (2016) has a slightly different view. In this competition, the winner was announced by a competent jury, including several architects, while an external expert evaluated the sustainability of the winning design. However, the examined sustainability had no impact on the jurors' selection of the winner, as the 'soft' aesthetic criteria took priority over the 'hard' facts. For

this reason, Östman argues that sustainability criteria should be integrated into the jurors' review of the design proposals. In both the Norrköping competitions, the conflict regarding the climate footprint criterion was less than expected because all proposals met the 'hard' requirement of 40% reduction of CO_2 emissions. Hence, the jurors could focus on the 'soft' aspects of the design proposals. The organiser had bridged the potential tension between external and internal expertise during the competitions in three ways: (a) partly through appointing an in-house energy expert as a juror, (b) partly by having two external experts review energy use and climate declarations, and (c) partly by approving design proposals that fulfil measurable goals, which were then ranked by their quality. This interplay between 'soft' and 'hard' criteria is often experienced in judging processes during design developer competitions.

- **Step 3:** *Developing individual and collective opinions.* Learning from practice is typical of professional jury work. Design developer competitions are a call for early knowledge production in architecture by the jurors. For example, 'start by reading each proposal' is a recommendation in the Swedish Architects' guidelines. This advice is designed to enable diverse voices to be heard, creating a dialogue between professionals inside the jury room. In these two case studies, the jurors were required to read the proposals individually at home and return to the jury room with their opinions about each design. Individuals' judgements gradually transformed into collective judgements during their deliberations. At first, it seemed easy to make good judgements about the competing entries and to clarify the solutions. The more the jurors learned about the contributions by reviewing them, the better they saw the critical aspects of the competition programme criteria. Their discussions seemed to operate smoothly, but only at the end of the assessments, when the entries needed to be ranked in the competition, did the differences in expert opinion among the jurors become visible inside the jury room. These difficulties were bridged by the jurors' ethical obligation to identify winners.

- **Step 4:** *Sort design ideas and solutions into sense-making patterns.* The juries must divide and categorise the competing design proposals based on the fundamental criteria presented in the competition programmes (Rönn, 2019). The purpose is to find, express and demonstrate the crucial differences between the competing contributions. Categorisations create meaningful patterns as a starting point for the design review. The more proposals jurors must assess, the greater the need for categorisation (Rönn, 2019; Svensson, 2012; Wærn, 2010). As there were only a handful of proposals in each of the Norrköping competitions, the juries did not need to divide the 10 proposals into several categories to make sense of their differences

initially. However, categorisation made sense later in the jury work when they compared the competing proposals. At first, the juries could review the design ideas in the proposals by looking at how each tried to solve the tasks set in the competition programme. The winning contribution in the invited competition was an architectural framework that visualised using recycling concepts for the facade, particularly as recycled materials were proposed for the building's framework and flexible housing is designed for families that grow or shrink over time. The winner of the open competition also presented a framework using recycled sheet metal and windows, with its facade showing a uniform and elegant character. The target groups were another major difference between the invited and open competitions. For example, constructing several small apartments on one site is attractive to single-person households and young adults. These distinct patterns must make sense when the proposals are viewed in situ on their competition plots and the winning designs must demonstrate diverse ways to solve shared challenges. The jurors are responsible for seeing the bigger picture across the various possibilities that the various entries present to the organiser (Kreiner, 2020). Hence, the categorisation of proposals becomes a necessary starting point in the jurors' evaluation, which can be conducted after submissions have been sent to the organiser.

- **Step 5:** *Comparing design proposals in relative autonomy.* The jurors conducted four comparisons, although not in strict order. First, the jurors compared the design proposals with the judging criteria stated in the competition programmes. Second, the contributions were compared as overall solutions to the competition task. Third, the entries were compared in terms of their design details. Fourth, the digital models in the proposals were compared. Comparison is used when there are several solutions to the same design problem (Cross, 2025), which is typically the case in architectural and urban design competitions. In addition, the organiser usually wants to make room for surprises and accommodate unforeseen proposals (Kreiner et al., 2011). Comparison in design developer competitions aims to identify the similarities and differences among the design proposals, which in turn form the logical basis for the jurors' rankings. Dewey (1939) regards comparison as a key concept in valuation. Design characteristics are not the only element made visible through comparisons, as their outcomes are much wider. For example, the jurors observed that none of the submissions provided the best solution for all eight judging criteria after comparing all entries. Hence, the jurors must make an overall assessment of the design proposals (Rönn & Koch, 2022). Both competition programmes provided the jurors with the freedom to make an overall decision.

- **Step 6:** *Ranking proposals.* Ranking contributions in design developer competitions combines professional architectural critiques with quantifying the qualities of each proposal according to soft and hard criteria. Without ranking designs as good, better or worse, professional juries cannot credibly choose winners; therefore, ranking design proposals is mandatory in design developer competitions. Design proposals are often ranked both in terms of subjective criticism and quantified numbers, because engineers and architects largely comprise juries in design developer competitions. Engineers tend to pursue rational decision-making according to the weighted and scored criteria outlined in competition programmes, where winning proposals have the highest rankings (Bazerman & Moore, 2008; Svensson, 2009). In contrast, Swedish Architects recommends competition jurors to avoid using ranking to grade designs because architects are trained to judge design proposals by critiquing their architectural characteristics (Lundequist, 2002; Lymer, 2010). Hence, all eight judging criteria in the Norrköping competitions were given the same weight. For the organiser, this also became a method for bridging potential conflicts in advance by using both measurable 'hard' criteria (i.e. energy use, climate footprint, and affordable rent/costs) and assessable, subjective 'soft' criteria (i.e. architectural quality, circular processes, social sustainability, innovation and developability). The organiser provided the jurors with a simple scoring tool to support their ranking choices, which was used to corroborate the rankings obtained through architectural critiques. Another reason for using a ranking score design in Sweden is that the allocation of municipal land to companies is not seen as an architectural or urban design task. Municipal policies typically assign the Department of Land Allocation and Development with the responsibility for allocating land using competitions, tenders or direct allocation (Rönn & Koch 2023), which is the case in Norrköping. Practical collaborations between municipal departments for physical planning, architecture and urban development depend on how strong the focus is on architecture in design development competitions. Thus, jurors' ranking of design proposals during competitions is often influenced by external objectives, criteria and requirements for submitting architectural drawings, as well as land allocation policies.

- **Step 7:** *Observing differences.* At this stage of the design evaluation process, jurors must identify the pros and cons of each design proposal. Hence, they must elucidate the differences in the quality of the proposed designs and then emphasise the importance of these differences in their final rankings. Especially when comparing the best competing proposals in the final steps of the jurors' assessment, emphasising these minor differences may make the winning choices more obvious. Examples of these minor differences, with decisive importance in the final selection

of the winner in the invited competition were the flexible, apartment design and how their architectural design reflected circularity. These two aspects of the winning design were highlighted from a future-oriented perspective, such as the circularity in winning designs, including: (a) design strategies, (b) recycled materials and (c) requests for collaboration with the municipality. Innovative solutions for flexible housing were perceived as credible. In the open competition, the jurors' interpretations of the architectural qualities of the design proposals decided the final winner. In this case, the jurors experienced difficulties in identifying the relevant differences in quality that could be ranked and emphasised. The recycled sheet metal in the facade of the winning design facing the park became decisive because of the need to reflect the urban quality of the competition site. The elegance of the recycled facade allowed the residential building to reflect the urban characteristics of its site, which appealed to the jurors. The design team with the winning design also collaborated with a contractor who recycled sheet metal in their business model, which made their design proposal more credible than the other competing designs.

- **Step 8:** *Identifying winning design ideas, qualities and values.* Advice from Swedish, Norwegian and Danish architectural associations seems clear: focus on innovative design concepts. However, few studies have evaluated how design proposals are considered during jury deliberations. Professional recommendations suggest that jurors should identify innovative concepts in the design proposals, which Drake (1979) called 'primary generators' because of their driving force in design processes. Jurors are recommended to pay special attention to identifying strong ideas, qualities and values, instead of searching for errors. In both the Norrköping competitions, the juries expressed their judgements, exchanged comments and evaluated the competing proposals similarly to architectural competitions (Svensson, 2013). In addition, Al-Qaysi (2018) considers jurors' subjective and objective judgements in selecting the best solution. Jurors' individual preferences, choices and reasoning in their evaluations must be co-ordinated in a joint statement justifying their choice of winner. After following most of the fundamental principles in the Nordic tradition, the jurors did their best to justify their winning choice (Svensson, 2008). As the jurors examined the design proposals individually and collectively, they exchanged comments in several rounds and eventually agreed to choose a winning design. Their choice of winning proposals in each competition was attributed to crucial values and qualities as being better than the other competing proposals. However, judging theory is based on the specific steps that must be taken during jury deliberations.

Describing the winning choice in the jury report

The jury report communicated the jurors' choice of winning design proposals following their deliberations. These reports are the result of both steering design proposals 'ahead' of time (e.g. using competition programme criteria or pre-qualification processes) and 'afterwards' by selecting the winner from the competing design proposals. Hence, judging combines both ex-ante and ex-post choices (Rönn, 2013), which influence each other. By pre-qualifying competitors, the Norrköping municipality ex-ante guided the jurors' choices using competition programme criteria, which described the task, objectives and judging criteria, including delivery demands. Similarly, the jurors' ex-post choices followed their evaluation of the value and quality of the design proposals according to the programme criteria, which can only begin after the proposals have been submitted to the organiser. The competing teams' expression of their vision using design proposals is transformed into jurors' impressions during their deliberations. The choice of winners in the Norrköping competitions appears as both the result of gradual learning about the proposals and competition criteria among the jurors and powerful insights after singling out the best solution overall. Hence, the jury picks the winner before finalising the jury report (Kreiner, 2020), as shown in the jury work field notes. However, the jurors' decisions must be described in their jury report, including the underlying motivation for their choice of winner, which becomes official when the municipality awards the contract for the build to the winning design team. Hence, the jurors must consider several ethical aspects when reporting the outcome, as their report will be widely read by professional colleagues, competing companies, municipal officials working at the town-planning department, politicians and the public. In addition, their decisions will be announced in the press. The competition programmes, design proposals and jury reports for the two case studies were also presented publicly on the Swedish Architects' website, Norrköping municipality's website and the Centre for Housing Architecture at Chalmers University of Technology. Norrköping citizens could also view the design proposals and jury reports in an exhibition at the Norrköping museum.

In expressing their choice of winners (Figure 3), the jurors must describe their selections logically, ethically and fairly to the design teams, and reflect on the differences in value and quality between competing design proposals. Hence, the jurors' choice of winners becomes more of an artistic fulfilment than a scientific choice. The two resulting jury reports following the Norrköping competitions reflect the characteristics of architectural criticism, as their structure and wording include an introductory overview, description of the proposals, comments and evaluative judgements. Seen from this perspective, the jury reports are in line with the Swedish Architects' standards and recommendations. The judging was conducted as a type of architectural criticism in action, although influenced by the organiser's willingness to transform design qualities into measured properties using design

developer competitions (Rönn & Koch, 2022). As judgements about design characteristics must overcome uncertainty during the evaluation process (Kreiner, 2020), the jury reports must bridge this lack of certainty about the future, legitimise their winning choice and justify the evaluation process. Hence, deciding on the wording in jury reports is the jurors' final assignment.

Figure 3

Jury members deliberating in the jury room. Photo: Magnus Rönn.



Concluding remarks

Fair play in these two case studies concerns the anonymous presentation of design proposals and the ethical use of a scoring tool for ranking to ensure that the competing solutions meet the soft and hard criteria set by the competition programmes. The four conditions in both competitions establish fair play. First, requiring the submissions to be presented anonymously according to the competition programme criteria encourages fairness and equality because the jurors must focus on the presented solutions. Second, the anonymous presentation of submissions prevents any direct dialogue between the competitors and juries during their evaluation of design proposals, which minimises the risk of competitors influencing the jurors or biasing them by presenting new information. Third, the jurors must review the submissions according to the assessment criteria outlined in the competition programmes. While jurors may interpret design proposals in developing their evaluations, they cannot produce new judging criteria. Hence, they cannot change the terms of the competition. Fourth, by accepting only design proposals that meet submission requirements, the organiser pre-empts the need for jurors to eliminate proposals that violate basic conditions. None of the 10 submissions were eliminated in both competitions; hence, both competitions established these four conditions for fair play.

The relationship between fair play and jurors' ethical considerations when ranking design proposals, singling out winners and making public announcements has been documented. In addition, the jurors' professional reputations are at stake because the jury reports in these case studies will be publicly announced on the Swedish Architects' website. The jury reports will be carefully read by Norrköping municipality officials, competing colleagues, external architects and design companies. Hence, the architects on the jury must ethically and professionally describe, explain and assess each submission because their judgements will be examined publicly. In addition, they must fairly describe their motivation for the winning choice so that it becomes legitimised in the public view. As politicians must transfer the competition site to the winning team, the jurors must clearly report their rankings and professionally describe the differences between top-ranked candidates.

The jurors' evaluation of design proposals in both competitions reflects the characteristics of architectural critiques, which is a method for professionally assessing architecture taught in architectural schools and practiced by professional architects. The research group's observations inside the jury room, the jurors' review of submissions and development of jury reports clearly indicate that the jurors expressed their architecture critiques as oral questions to their peers on the jury during their examination of the design proposals and as written comments in their jury reports. In the first case, architectural critiques were a central element of the jurors' evaluation. By discussing the design proposals with their peers, the jurors clarified their understanding of each proposal's merits and shortcomings. The jurors' individual opinions gradually coalesce into collective opinions during their deliberations, which determines the order of submissions, particularly as there is a strong need for consensus in the Swedish tradition. As the final step in the jurors' assessment of the design proposals, the jury reports must summarise the competing proposals and selected illustrations as a whole and rank each submission, including concise descriptions and brief quality judgements. Hence, the two jury reports are typical expressions of architectural critiques.

Considering the jurors' design judgements and theorising their findings, the complex answers to the research questions in this article point in several directions for future research. In particular, the assessment criteria serve as a starting point for jury work. When competition proposals met the criteria for climate footprint and energy use, these requirements were not serious issues affecting the jurors' assessment. The impact of external information and actions on the jurors may be seen as controversial. However, the anonymous presentation of submissions drives the jurors to direct their design reviews towards the proposals at hand and their solutions to the task – and not on the competing design teams' reputation and competence. Nevertheless, the municipal planning context influenced the jurors' understanding of the quality of design proposals, the nature of the

competition sites and the benefits for the presumed target groups. The research group's field notes from both Norrköping competitions show that the jurors' comments on the qualities, values and design pros and cons were a decisive aspect of their evaluation of the winning designs. The critical steps in finding and agreeing upon a winner were identified and theorised. This study shows that the jurors' selection of the winning designs was constructed in their jury reports, which explained their judgements using explanatory, sense-making patterns to give legitimacy and credibility to their decisions.

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