

Architectural competitions support student creativity

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ABSTRACT: Architectural competitions enable students to demonstrate practical skills acquired from their education. Participation in competitions stimulates creativity, motivating students to create better, bolder projects. Participating in competitions is a way for students to understand their skill levels as compared with those of other participants and helps to understand the effect of the teaching. The competition project forces students to search for original solutions. Although the project is based on knowledge acquired during studies, it is completely independent. An additional incentive for making students do their best is that evaluation of their work will be made public. This forces students to work harder on the competition projects than on their regular course projects. The students' engagement leads to new knowledge acquisition, skills broadening and creativity boost. In this way, the main goal of student competitions, which is to support the teaching process and develop students' creativity, can be achieved.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching design and its principles stimulates and triggers individual creativity. These are the basic tasks in educating architects. It is important that the purpose and role of all subjects on the curriculum for educating architects are properly formulated. The teaching programme is implemented in the form of theoretical, design and practical classes, which should be integrated and complementary.

The tasks require the students to practise their acquired skills, which is one of the main aims of the competitions held for architectural students. Moreover, the competitions allow students to compare their skills against those of the other contestants. Winning the competition, taking a premium place and even participation alone provides students with great satisfaction which, in turn, stimulates creativity. This motivates them to create better, bolder projects, which is particularly important when the award-winning project is implemented. It should be noted that competitions need to follow the organisational rules by which they are held.

METHODS

The author has completed research at European and Polish faculties of architecture. He has taught classes in the Faculty of Architecture at Cracow University of Technology (FA-CUT), Kraków, Poland, for more than 40 years, and for a substantial number of years has developed curricula and taught at three other architectural faculties. The author has also participated in organising architectural competitions for students as a jury member, chairman of the jury or the investor's representative. The sum of acquired knowledge may constitute the basis for an attempt to present the issues related to the organisation of architectural competitions and their importance in the education of architects. Relevant literature on the subject also has been used in the analysis.

COMPETITION PRINCIPLES

The competition is a type of *public promise*, with a set date of contesting for the prize awarded to the best activity or work that meets the defined criteria for winning. This is a procedure based on the principles of competition for the prize aimed at making the contestants achieve the highest level of skill or quality. The jury selects the best performance and awards the authors the promised prize. The competition motivates the contestants to do their best. The jury members are competent and the assessed works are anonymous during the evaluation procedure. Participation in the competition is voluntary. These rules should be met in each competition, because only then can the expected goals be achieved. This is particularly important in student competitions. Quite often, some students who take part in competitions for the first time analyse the organisational rules very meticulously, and sometimes also emotionally before they decide to enter. Shown in Figure 1 are post-competition entries displayed within St Luke's Academy (Accademia di San Luca), Rome, in May 2018.



Figure 1: Post-competition exhibition in the Department of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, St Luke's Academy, May 2018.

THE TEACHING AND ACADEMIC COMPETITIONS: ST LUKE'S ACADEMY, ROME

St Luke's Academy (Accademia di San Luca) in Rome (Figure 2) is one of the oldest schools of painting, sculpture and architecture founded by decree of Pope Gregory XIII on 15 December 1577. The essential principles of academic teaching were formed in the 18th Century and based on the ideas of Giovanni Bottari, who tried to prove that drawing skills were indispensable in the architectural profession. The Academy curriculum included all the fields of the art of *disegno* (this essentially is a combination of the ability to create the drawing and design). In the 18th Century, the Academy introduced the following chairs: theoretical architecture, practical architecture, basic and decorative architecture, two chairs of nude drawing, two chairs of sculpture, mythology, history, archaeology, anatomy, geometry, perspective, stone engraving, copperplate engraving and hydraulics applied in art. The teaching was not divided into *specialties*.



a)

b)

Figure 2: St Luke's Academy (Accademia di San Luca) within the Palazzo Carpegna, Rome; a) façade; and b) interior.

Academic competitions played an extremely stimulating role in the teaching activities of the institution [1]. In the school's archives is a collection of drawings divided into two subject groups corresponding to the subjects of competitions. One group consists of drawings on typically architectural subjects, while the other includes drawings of a wide range of compositions, landscape or figures. However, the division did not preclude students of painting from participating in architectural competitions or architectural students from entering competitions the subjects of which were landscape compositions or figures.

From the year 1702, information about the competitions organised at the Academy is quite detailed. It was then that Pope Clement XI granted the school funds for the organisation of architectural competitions, which were called *clementine* competitions in his honour. These were the first competitions run with prizes and according to strict rules. The organisational mechanism was as follows: three subjects of increasing difficulty from three levels (classes) were proposed for a large composition placed in urban space or open landscape, although there were smaller projects, which was a drawing from nature of a set architectural complex or detail. The latter task was assigned to students in the third class; subjects for the first and second class were to be inspired by the current problems.

The Academy competitions were not limited to those that were clementines. From 1768, an autonomous contest was organised named after the architect, Carlo Pio Balestra. There were 16 editions of the event, until 1913. Based on one subject, it addressed the important problems discussed in Rome at the time, such as the landscaping of the Ripa Grande park (1768); the complete rebuilding of the large urban square in Rome, the Piazza del Popolo through extending the Saint Augustine monastery and designing a new church (1773). Another competition was supported by the Italian sculptor, Antonio Canova, and was given his name. At least seven editions of the competition were held.

The last competitions, which survived a transition to what is known as *the Piedmont period* were Luigi Poletti and Giovanni Montiroli (both were architects). Competitions were also held often during the *fascist period* in the early 20th Century, and their subjects were public buildings. Academic competitions survived in an almost unchanged form until the 20th Century.

They constituted a sort of crowning of the teaching process and were a specific *magisterium*. Paolo Marconi, Angela Cipriani and Enrico Valeriani distinguished three periods when competitions were organised: 1) from the end of the 18th Century until the French Revolution; 2) from Napoleon's occupation of Rome until the Piedmontese occupation; and 3) until the Academy's dissolution and the introduction of architectural faculties into universities in the 1930s [2].

The first period was marked by the domination of Rome in European architecture. St Luke's Academy at that time was permeated with corporate spirit and although it was home to many outstanding artists, some restrictions on enlightenment ideas were noticeable.

The second period was the time when Rome was reduced to performing a national or even regional role. The competitors were no longer such excellent artists as before and finally the competitions were discontinued.

The competitions held at St Luke's Academy, from the 16th Century to the early 1900s, played an extremely significant role in its teachings. The Academy became a model for organised architectural education in Europe, both as regards the schools of architecture at fine arts academies and technical universities.

EVALUATION OF PROJECTS

In some architectural colleges, projects made in the course of studies are assessed in a way that resembles procedures carried out for competitions. Points are allocated for selected project elements, such as urban planning solutions, the construction used, the elevation composition, functional solutions, graphic presentation of the project, and so on. The sum of points for individual components makes the final assessment of the project more nuanced than that resulting from the obligatory scale of grades. Thus, it is possible to rank as many as 200 students. To some extent, the list is regarded as a catalogue of competition results. The students are familiar with the scoring criteria and they try to present their projects to obtain the highest scores; creativity is secondary.

The students point out that participation in competitions should be voluntary and the authors of the projects should remain anonymous. Unfortunately, these requirements cannot be met for course projects, because each is assigned to an individual known to the tutor. Students have claimed that in many cases the final assessment is highly subjective and often depends on the tutor's arguments, which do not always relate to the essence of the evaluated project. They have also noted that the assessment is influenced by their class attendance. They have concluded that this system of evaluation and rankings does not encourage them to improve the quality of their projects.

SELECTED COMPETITIONS: FA-CUT DEPARTMENT OF DRAWING, PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

The basic task for architectural students is to acquire knowledge and skills indispensable for the shaping of space. Drawing, painting and sculpture are tools for making this happen. In the teaching of architecture, these subjects are closely connected to the teaching of the design subjects and other related issues that make up the prospective architect's knowledge. This influences how well-prepared the architectural student is for the profession.

The teaching structure in the Faculty of Architecture's Department of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture is centred on drawing and the plastic arts. However, it should be emphasised that an essential principle of teaching architecture is the integration of a set of subjects regarding the modern world [3]. The teaching of drawing and plastic arts serves this purpose.

The Department organises competitions for architectural students. Students realise that the plastic arts courses taught at the Department are closely linked with courses in other subjects, especially in design. This is confirmed by the Department competitions, which end in the implementation of the winning project [4].

It is also important that the competition jury should include not only employees of the Department of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, but also teachers of design courses. In this way, the students are made aware that all subjects are integrated.

In January 2006, a national architectural competition was organised by staff at the Department of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture for the *Design of sets of furniture for the living room and the dining room*. Terms and conditions of the competition were specified in the competition regulations. The competition was aimed at students of architecture, interior design and industrial design. The sponsor was Fornit, a furniture manufacturing company. The aim of the competition was to demonstrate the skills of university architectural students and to obtain original projects showing innovative aesthetic features. There were no restrictions as to the use of materials; students could apply both traditional and modern materials. The furniture had to be functional, producible and marketable; 24 projects qualified for the contest.

On 1 April 2006, prizes were awarded by the jury comprising employees of the Department of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture; teachers of design courses at the Faculty of Architecture in CUT; a representative of the Association of Polish Architects; the editor-in-chief of ARCHIVOLTA, an architectural periodical; and a representative of the sponsoring firm. The jury's task was to select the best projects that were producible in terms of execution, originality and innovation. It should be emphasised that most works demonstrated great creativity. They were compelling projects characterised also by some unusual combinations of material. The Grand Prix was awarded to Maciej Dylag from the Faculty of Architecture at Silesian University of Technology in Gliwice, Poland, for the dining room set of furniture made from plywood and aluminium and formed into original, unusual shapes (see Figure 3).

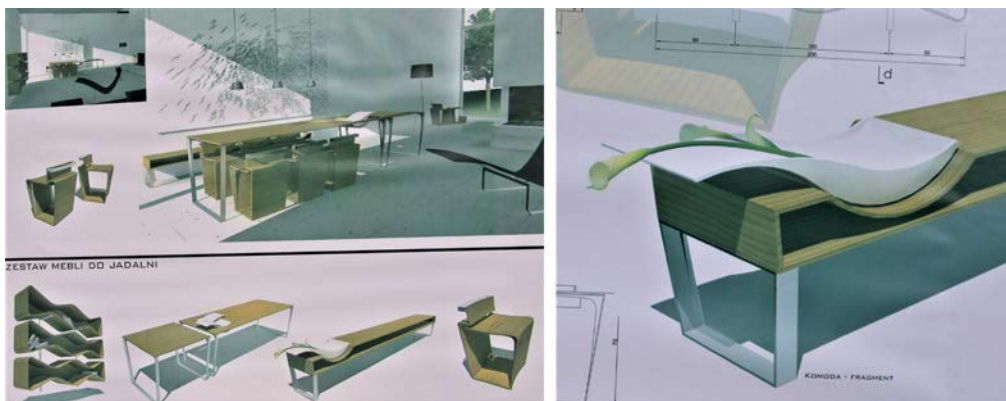


Figure 3: Architectural competition for the *Design of sets of furniture for the living room and dining room*. The Grand Prix for the dining room furniture was awarded to Maciej Dylag.

In 2017, an architectural competition was held by staff of the Department of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture for *Covered parking spaces for bicycles and motorbikes on the CUT campus* (Figure 4). The competition was announced in February and the terms and conditions were outlined in the competition regulations. It was a closed competition intended for the students of Cracow University of Technology, *Jan Matejko* Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, the Pedagogical University of Cracow, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Kraków University College and Silesian University of Technology in Gliwice.



Figure 4: Architectural competition for *Covered parking spaces for bicycles and motorbikes on the CUT campus*. First prize was awarded to Marzena Kądziołka, Radosław Domżoł and Jakub Jedynak.

The participants were obliged to fill in competition entry forms and submit them to the organiser. On 8 April 2017, the results were announced. The jury, consisting of the representatives of the Department of Drawing, Painting and

Sculpture, teachers from the institutes of design at the Faculty of Architecture in CUT and other CUT faculties, as well as a representative of the administration of the University. The following criteria were applied to evaluate the works: compliance with the subject of the competition; originality of the work; the creativity of the authors; and the aesthetic qualities and artistic value of the work. There were 38 entries. They all met formal requirements. Most projects were highly original.

In addition to the design and the structure and materials from which the cover was to be made, the authors usually chose the appropriate location of the covered parking spots on the campus. The jury chose three projects for first, second and third prizes, and one project received an honourable mention. First prize was awarded to the project authored by the CUT students Marzena Kądziołka, Radosław Domżał and Jakub Jedynak. The prizes were handed to the winners during the School Festival at CUT, when the competition was discussed and the results presented. There was also an exhibition of all the projects entered for the competition.

In January 2018, an architectural competition was held by staff of the Department of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture: *Development of the area between the Działownia Research and Development Centre of CUT and the warehouse on the campus in Warszawska Street*. The aim was to choose a concept for development of the area. Before specifying the terms of the competition, the student self-government group at CUT asked students to complete a questionnaire on suggested functions and elements to be located in the area. The results of the questionnaire revealed that students expected the project to include programmes related to gastronomy, recreation, exhibition and other activities.

The postulate of the student self-government group of CUT was to include elements, such as benches with tables, sofas, lighting, a screen on one of the walls, greenery and access to electricity to charge laptops and phones. As well, the historic ramp for transporting cannons had to remain but be provided with a contemporary function. It was a closed competition intended solely for the students of CUT. All competitors were given geodetic maps of the area and documentation of the adjacent buildings. They were required to fill in an entry form and submit it to the organiser by 21 May 2018 as a condition for entering the competition. The project had to be displayed on a maximum of four 50 cm x 70 cm boards and submitted to the organiser by 28 May 2018. All terms and conditions of the competition were specified in competition regulations.

On 1 June 2018, the results were announced. The competition jury included employees of the Department, representatives of design institutes and a student representative, who did not take part in the competition. All the entries met formal requirements. The jury assessed the projects using similar criteria to those applied previously. Two equivalent second prizes and a third prize were awarded, and one work received an honourable mention. There was no first prize, because none of the projects could be implemented in its original form. The projects awarded second prize could be implemented after some minor alterations. One of the winning projects was authored by Adrian Bala, a second-year student of the Faculty of Architecture (see Figure 5), and the authors of the other were Jakub Kubicki and Michał Ptak from first year and Matylda Grzywacz from third year of the Faculty of Architecture. In June 2018, all competition entries were presented at an exhibition.

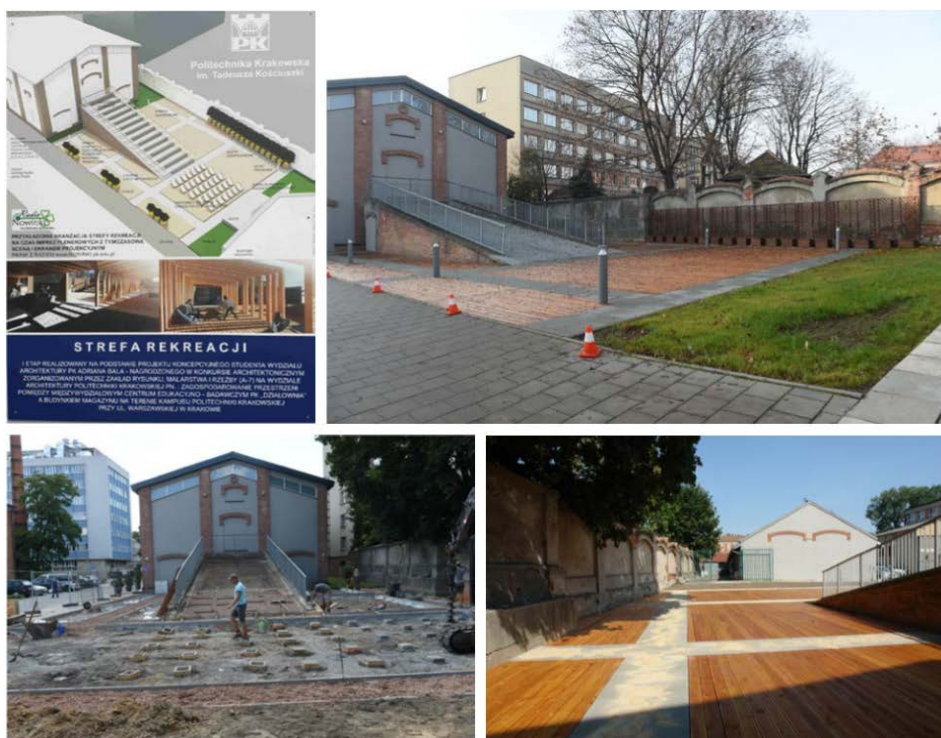


Figure 5: Architectural competition for *Development of the area between the Działownia Research and Development Centre of CUT and the warehouse on the campus in Warszawska Street*. One of the winning projects was authored by Adrian Bala.

In September 2019, before the inauguration of the academic year, the implementation of one of the second-prize winning projects was completed. It was slightly changed to adapt to the technical conditions associated with its implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

Architectural competitions for students play an important role in the teaching of architecture. Apart from confronting the knowledge and skills of participants, they foster creativity and motivate students to make bolder projects [5]. Independent work on the competition project forces students to look for individual solutions. Although students' work is based on the knowledge acquired in the course of studies, the competition project is completely independent, and it is not subject to the tutor's review or guidelines.

Given their independence, the competition participants assume much more responsibility for their work. They try to do their best, because they know that the competition results will be made public. Thus, they work harder on the competition projects than on the regular course projects. As a result, students often extend their knowledge and skills. However, for all this to happen, basic principles of competition organisation must be observed. Only then can student competitions achieve their goal, which is to support teaching, develop creativity and result in better and bolder projects during studies.

The author of this article has talked to the Faculty members who teach design courses and analysed grades for projects of students taking part in competitions. The teachers of design courses opined that students who took part in competitions, and especially those who achieved significant success, were later more active in classes and made better projects. It was also reflected in the grades they received for their course projects. This proves that student competitions significantly support the didactic process, and thus serve their purpose.

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