ARCH E

The European Platform for
Architectural Design Competition

# ARCH-E White Paper

## Recommendations for Quality-based Procurement Processes by Using Architectural Design Competitions

Co-funded by the
European Union

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**Disclaimer:** In the ARCH-E White Paper, the term architectural design competition (ADC) is used, which also describes procedures that are referred to as design contests in the EU Directive 2014/24/EU.

# ARCH-E Partners and Cooperation Partner

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|---|---|
| **BKZT** | Federal Chamber of Civil Engineers (Austria) \| Bundeskammer der Ziviltechniker:innen |
| **ACE** | Architects' Council of Europe |
| **CCA** | Croatian Chamber of Architects \| Hrvatska komora arhitekata |
| **ZAPS** | Chamber of Architecture and Spatial Planning of Slovenia \| Zbornica za arhitekturo in prostor Slovenije |
| **CAA** | Cyprus Architects Association \| Σύλλογος Αρχιτεκτόνων Κύπρου |
| **BAK** | Federal Chamber of German Architects \| Bundesarchitektenkammer |
| **TU/e** | Eindhoven University of Technology \| Technische Universiteit Eindhoven |
| **UPV** | Polytechnic University of Valencia \| Universitat Politècnica de València |
| **SEPA** | SEPA Engineering GmbH |
| **MÉK** | Chamber of Hungarian Architects \| Magyar Építész Kamara |
| **UIA** | International Union of Architects \| Union Internationale des Architectes |
| | The Chamber of Architects in South Tyrol (Province of Bolzano) \| Ordine degli Architetti, P.P.C. della Provincia di Bolzano |
| **ČKA** | Czech Chamber of Architects \| Česká komora architektů |
| **CNOA** | National Council of the Order of Architects \| Conseil National de l'Ordre des Architectes |
| **SIA** | Swiss Association of Engineers and Architects \| Schweizerischer Ingenieur- und Architektenverein |

# Introduction

## ARCH-E & the Project Consortium

Architectural Design Competitions (ADCs) play an essential role in improving our built environment and the living conditions of people in general. They were first established in ancient Greece in 448 BC to find the best solution for a memorial designed for the Acropolis. Over the centuries ADCs became common practice in the professional life of architects. To name some world famous examples: Brunelleschi's dome of the Florence Cathedral *Santa Maria del Fiore* – a competition announced in 1418; the urban planning competition for the *Ringstrasse* in Vienna – this globally open 'concurs' took place in 1858; and icons like the *Sydney Opera House* (1956) and the *Centre Pompidou* (1971) that kick-started the careers of the young and previously unknown architects Jørn Utzon, Richard Rogers, and Renzo Piano.

The competition procedure is the ideal procurement method to allow for the inclusion of users and the general public. Their knowledge can easily be included before, during, and after the competition while, at the same time, guaranteeing anonymity of authorship throughout the process as the architects work on their proposals. Other relevant experts such as engineers and landscape designers can participate often in the form of interdisciplinary teams.

ADCs are a valuable tool for the profession to develop creative expertise by testing ideas, comparing the results, and thereby improving one's own skills through learning from others.

While competitions are commonly used by numerous professionals in many countries, on occasion they are misused to exploit the members of the creative community. The EU Public Procurement Directive must therefore provide more precise regulation to guarantee minimum quality standards for the competition brief, the quality of procedures, and the reporting on the outcome.

Arch-E research shows that currently 95% of architectural offices are excluded from public procurement due to restrictive participation requirements such as

turnover and minimum staffing. In practise, this leads to a loss of innovation for procuring authorities' projects on all levels.

Open competitions provide better access for SMEs, as well as female architects who often work in smaller units, with a view to improving the gender balance of the profession.

The revision of the EU Public Procurement Directive needs to address these shortcomings by providing clear guidance in a specific chapter for intellectual services and defining strict obligations to ensure that public monies are disbursed only on a quality basis. The quality focus in public procurement can also lead to greater cross-border activities and therefore efficiently strengthen the internal market by reducing preventive barriers.

Data collected and analysed by both universities involved in the ARCH-E project help to understand the real limits of market access in the cross-border work of architects. Helpful tools have subsequently been developed in ARCH-E to assist in overcoming these obstacles.

The ARCH-E project, led by the Austrian Federal Chamber of Architects and Chartered Engineers (BKZT), is working with a consortium of ten partners and five cooperation partners, among them the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE) and several ACE member organisations as full partners and the International Union of Architects (UIA) as a cooperation partner. The consortium reaches a group of 560,000 architects and works with a budget of €1.4 M, of which 70% is funded by the EU's Creative Europe Programme. By the end of the project in the beginning of 2026, the gathered material, documents, and information will migrate to the website and app of the Architects' Council of Europe, the representative organisation of 600,000 architects in Europe, to be available for further development.

Moreover, the ARCH-E consortium is happy to grant an open license to the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), the European Commission, and all European Union institutions to make use of the ARCH-E materials and documents in all forms. ARCH-E data will thus have a direct impact on policy papers and the legislative processes.

The revision process of the Public Procurement legislation in the EU has recently started. This offers a window of opportunity for the architectural

profession, the procuring authorities, and the legislators to implement the urgently needed fundamental re-shaping of the procurement landscape for the coming decade. As the European Commission stresses in its communication ‘Making Public Procurement work in and for Europe’, 55 % of current procurement procedures still use the lowest price as the sole award criterion.

The recommendations in the ARCH-E White Paper shall support this process of change by presenting important steps, practical levers, and efficient solutions to unleash the full potential of Public Procurement as a tool to ensure a higher quality of life for everyone and more ‘Baukultur’ based on economically efficient, sustainable, innovative, and inclusive projects all over Europe. It is, therefore, directed to all stakeholders in the procurement process.

ARCH-E research shows that ADCs lead to potentially significant cost savings. By comparing the built first prize projects with others submitted, collected data shows that construction costs are reduced by up to 18.3%. This is not surprising, as submitted projects are thoroughly judged by a competent jury made up of experts, including architects and clients.

Last but not least, the outcome of any architectural design competition improves the quality of the built environment for everyone.

**DANIEL FÜGENSCHUH**

ACE Executive Board member and
President of BKZT, ARCH-E Leadpartner

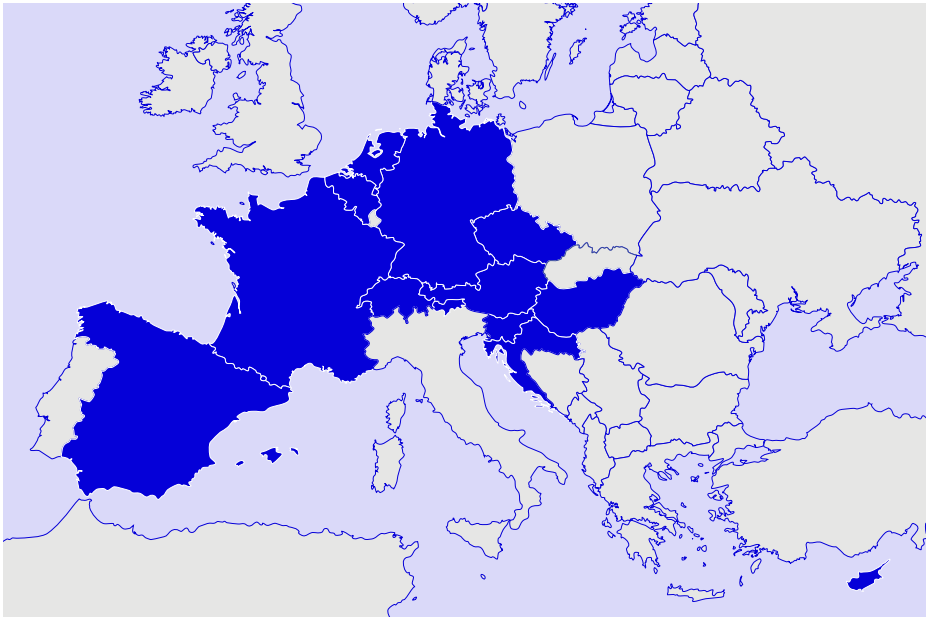


**Figure 0.1:** Map of ARCH-E Project Partners and Cooperation Partners.

# The Findings of ARCH-E as a Basis for the Recommendations

**ARCH-E is gathering and connecting existing data on the legal frameworks for architectural design competitions (ADC), on participation in cross-border ADCs, and hurdles architects encounter in such. Three project results especially contributed to this effort:**

- **The ARCH-E Glossary** is more than a mere dictionary of the ADC jargon. It brings together 11 country-specific perspectives on architectural competition procedures in Europe. A total of 190 terms explains the regional characteristics of this linguistic landscape of competition culture. Because the language mutations are not mere translations, but original descriptions of the local praxis in the subject areas, the terms can be compared with each other in the online tool and examined for similarities and differences. This compendium currently contains around 1,000 definitions.

Creating the ARCH-E Glossary was an important impulse for the project partners to learn more about the similarities and differences in the national legal frameworks for ADCs. Even though all national ADC systems comply with the EU Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement, significant variations exist. The fragmentation of the legal framework for ADCs poses a challenge to architects who are interested in participating in ADCs abroad. In the ARCH-E survey, 43% of respondents said that knowledge gaps concerning the country-specific ADC regulations abroad are a hurdle for them in participating in cross-border ADCs.

- **The ARCH-E Map on ADCs** gives an extensive overview of ADC systems in Europe. Country profiles about Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Slovenia, South Tyrol, Spain, Switzerland, and the Netherlands provide statistical data, information on the regulatory frameworks, and on current trends regarding ADC procedures. A second chapter combines insights and recommendations by 46 international experts and a comparative analysis of the examined ADC systems.

  A collection of good practices in ADC procedures gives exemplary insights on how topics like accessibility, quality-oriented decision processes, sustainability goals, and fairness can be considered in a contemporary competition culture.

  The work on the ARCH-E Map on ADCs further fostered knowledge transfer among the project partners, which were providing country-specific data to the researchers and authors, Prof. Juliette Bekkering, Dr. Torsten Schröder, and Dr. Grazia Tona at the Eindhoven University of Technology, Department of the Built Environment, Architectural Design and Engineering.

- **The Architects' Needs Report** is based on a survey conducted by ARCH-E gathering responses from architects from over 30 countries. While the Map on ADCs focuses on **systemic analysis**, the Architects' Needs Report concentrates on **individual architects' experiences**. The survey asked for the personal and professional context of the respondents, their experience in ADCs in general and cross-border specifically, hurdles and challenges encountered in participating in ADCs, and how architects' professional organisations and other institutional

stakeholders could provide support to mitigate these problems. In addition to the ARCH-E survey, a collaboration with the Architects' Council of Europe made it possible to include some ADC-specific questions in the biannual ACE Sector Study, reaching approximately 20,000 respondents.

In the analysis of the data, a special focus was cast on the problems small and/or female-lead offices encounter when participating in ADCs. The data from the survey confirmed a still persistent gender gap. As The Economist's glass ceiling index[1] and studies in the field indicate, the gender gap among architects perceived by the Architects' Needs Report cannot solely be attributed to direct factors within the ADC systems but is rooted in societal frameworks such as childcare.

In general, significant differences between the needs and problems of small and large architectural offices emerged in the analysis of the ARCH-E survey, a gap that can be mitigated in parts through the recommendations of the present paper.

- Beyond the formalised activities of ARCH-E, knowledge transfer among the project partners further deepened the understanding of the researched ADC systems and their relationship with the EU directives on public procurement. The network of experts growing and interconnecting around ARCH-E also contributes to understanding the European ADC landscape and the potentials for its improvement.
- ARCH-E's efforts to map the European architectural competition landscape, to identify barriers to cross-border participation in ADCs, particularly for SMEs and female architects, and to develop suggestions for improvement, could build on excellent work. The recommendations for improving the European ADC system take into account the **ACE Recommendations for Architectural Design Competitions**[2], the **UIA COMPETITION GUIDE for Design Competitions in Architecture and Related Fields**[3], the **New European Bauhaus Investment**

1 The Economist, 'The Economist's glass ceiling index', 6 March 2024, https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/glass-ceiling-index

2 The Architects' Council of Europe, 'Recommendations for Architectural Design Contests', https://ace-cae.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/ADC_Recommendations_Singles.pdf

3 The International Union of Architects, 'UIA Competition Guide for Design Competitions in Architecture and Related Fields', 2020, https://www.uia-architectes.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2_UIA_competition_guide_2020.pdf

**Guidelines**[4], the **WSA 2010* – the Austrian competition guidelines by BKZT**[5] and the by-law **Rules on Public Competitions (PJN) in Slovenia** (Slovenia, 2004-21)[6], the **German Richtlinien für Planungswettbewerbe (RPW 2013)**[7], and the **Swiss Regulations SIA 142 and SIA 143**[8] on anonymous ADCs and non-anonymous, dialogue-oriented ADC-formats. Beyond the specific topic of ADCs, the ACE publication **A VIEW FROM ABOVE – Comparing Public Procurement Guidelines for Architects**[9] offers an overview of public procurement guides in several European countries.

# The Goals of the ARCH-E Consortium

**The recommendations of the ARCH-E consortium address specific regulatory topics and procedural aspects of architectural design competitions. These recommendations are embedded in a broader framework of goals that contribute to a socially responsible, open, innovative, and sustainable European Baukultur.**

- **Improving Accessibility for Small and Mid-sized Enterprises to ADCs** | Among the highly qualified professions, architectural offices tend to operate in relatively small organisational forms compared to other branches. 92% of architects work in offices with a maximum of 5 staff members, with a clear majority of 68% of practises that are one-person-offices (ACE Sector Study, 2024)[10]. These SMEs predominantly

4 European Commission, *The New European Bauhaus Investment Guidelines* (Brussels: European Commission, 2024), https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/system/files/2024-07/NEB%20Investment%20Guidelines.pdf

5 Walter M. Chramosta, Nikolaus Hellmayr, Bundeskammer der Ziviltechniker:innen (eds.), *Wettbewerbsstandard Architektur 2010, Neuauflage 2022* (Vienna: Bundeskammer der Ziviltechniker:innen, 2022), https://www.architekturwettbewerb.at/files/zt_Wettbewerbsstandard_Architektur_WSA_15_05.pdf

6 https://www.uradni-list.si/glasilo-uradni-list-rs/vsebina/2004-01-4538/pravilnik-o-javnih-natecajih-za-izbiro-strokovno-najprimernejsih-resitev-prostorskih-ureditev-in-objektov

7 Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz, Bau und Reaktorsicherheit, 'Richtlinie für Planungswettbewerbe, RPW 2013', November 2014, https://www.bmwsb.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/Webs/BMWSB/DE/veroeffentlichungen/bauen/richtlinie-planungswettbewerbe.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1

8 Schweizerischer Ingenieur- und Architektenverein, *Ordnung für Architektur- und Ingenieurwettbewerbe* (Zurich: SIA, 2009), https://shop.sia.ch/normenwerk/architekt/sia%20142/d/2009/D/Product

9 The Architects' Council of Europe, *A VIEW FROM ABOVE – Comparing Public Procurement Guidelines for Architects*, June 2025, https://ace-cae.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/View-from-With-colofon-.pdf

10 The Architects' Council of Europe/Mirza & Nacey Research Ltd, *The Architectural Profession in Europe 2024 Sector Study* (Brussels: The Architects' Council of Europe, 2025), https://ace-cae.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2024-ACE-Sector-Study-EN-04042025.pdf

work regionally, with in-depth background knowledge of their clients' architectural requirements and regional construction methods with sustainable effects. They provide the basis of regional socio-economic ecosystems of the planning and construction sector and represent significant potential both economically and intellectually.

- **Improving Accessibility for Young Architects / Offices to ADCs** | ADCs are an important stepping stone for architects entering the market at the beginning of their career. The accessibility of ADCs is not only relevant for young professionals but contributes to continuously innovating architectural discourse of the whole sector. Young professionals often are among the pioneers to formulate innovative responses to contemporary challenges, stimulating intellectual competition with positive effects on the built environment and the architecture community.

- **Improving Accessibility for Female Architects to ADCs** | Although the gender balance is almost equal, with 46% of architects being women, the gender pay gap unfortunately persists. According to respondents to the ARCH-E survey, female architects work in smaller offices that achieve significant lower annual turnover.

  The ARCH-E consortium is aware that many reasons for the gender imbalance are based on societal framework conditions and are not limited to the profession of architects and/or regulatory frameworks. Improving possibilities to make family and work compatible, especially regarding parental leave systems and childcare options, have a direct impact on the individual economic situations of women.

  Nevertheless, there are some factors within the topic of ADCs that can help to improve gender equality: the parity of male and female architects in the constitution of ADC juries is an important goal. Moreover, invited ADCs, in contrast to open ADCs, still tend to be unnecessarily gender biased.

- **Improving Cross-border Accessibility to ADCs** | Only 7% of architectural offices worked in another European country in the last 12 months and numbers for participating in ADCs abroad are even lower. According to the ARCH-E Architects' Needs Report, the reasons for the relatively low professional mobility are diverse. Barriers specific to cross-border participation (e.g., language barriers, unfamiliarity

with specific country regulations, restraints in connection with the geographical distance, et cetera) were mentioned, as well as barriers that architects would also encounter in their home markets (e.g., participating requires a significant amount of effort and money, turnover thresholds, et cetera). Therefore, making ADCs more accessible in general holds the potential of improving professional mobility on the European market.

- **Counteracting Price Competition for Intellectual Services** | Data and its analysis presented in Chapter 2 of this paper show that winning architectural solutions in ADCs, compared to the competing concepts, are in almost all cases also the economically most advantageous projects. The according calculations only take into account the initial investment costs; the potential for savings are even higher considering the operating and maintenance costs in the course of the project's life cycle.

  The underlying intellectual services for such architectural concepts are increasingly under price pressure, as they are acquired through procurement procedures that are not suitable for design processes. Using ADCs counteracts this tendency. It would not only shift the focus to quality and innovation but help to find economically and environmentally sustainable architectural solutions.

- **Fostering Baukultur** | The ARCH-E consortium regards ADCs as an integral instrument to foster Baukultur, the built environment shaping everyday life and in consequence society. Its goals align with the *Declaration of Davos* (Davos Declaration 2018)[11] and the New European Bauhaus' *Investment Guidelines*[12].

[11] Office fédéral de la culture, 'Davos Declaration 2018', https://davosdeclaration2018.ch/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/06/2022-06-09-081317-davos-declaration.pdf

[12] European Commission, *New European Bauhaus Investment Guidelines*, https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/document/download/3f591237-1626-4959-920a-5271382bdd1b_en?filename=NEB%20Investment%20Guidelines.pdf

# CHAPTER 1

## List of Recommendations

## Context & Hard Facts on the Recommendations

# List of Recommendations

1. A Specific Chapter on Procuring Intellectual Services in the EU Directive with Specific Regulations for Planning Services in the Built or Natural Environment
2. Quality-Based Procurement through ADCs | The Principle of Best Solution as Opposed to Lowest Price Offer
3. Guaranteeing Qualified, Impartial, and Independent ADC Juries
4. Defining ADCs as the Default Procurement Procedure for Architectural Design | Except for Specific Projects Requiring Other Forms of Procurement
5. Committing Procurers to Thoroughly Prepare an ADC and to Realise the Project
6. A Binding Commitment by the Procurer to Commission the ADC Winner

**Supporting SMEs to Enter the European Market by Encouraging Competitiveness**

7. No Economical Criteria to Participate in ADCs
8. No Reference Projects to Participate in ADCs
9. Limiting the Required Depth of Elaboration for ADC Entries
10. Anonymity of the Participants Throughout the ADC Procedure

# Context & Hard Facts on the Recommendations

## Baukultur – Fostering Quality and Innovation as well as Finding Economically Advantageous Solutions through Architectural Design Competitions (ADCs)

### 1. A Specific Chapter on Procuring Intellectual Services in the EU Directive with Specific Regulations for Planning Services in the Built or Natural Environment

The ARCH-E consortium recommends differentiating procurement procedures for tangible goods, performance-related work, and intellectual (creative, specifically architectural) services. While it is possible to predefine required parameters for tangible goods and performance-related work at the beginning of a price-oriented procedure, this is not true for intellectual services. When creative intellectual services are procured, the solution for a certain requirement will be created by the service provider and therefore cannot be foreseen by the procurer.

Quality-based decision processes for the award of public contracts, like architectural design competitions, are a suitable way to obtain intellectual services that find the best solution. The broad nature of the current Directive of Procurement regarding the procurement of architectural services allows for a broad spectrum of national regulations, implementing the EU directive into the legal framework for architectural design competitions on a national level. ARCH-E's consortium deems it important to guarantee appropriate selection procedures for intellectual services leading to the successful realisation of the project and its optimal and sustainable use, since their nature does not allow their acquisition solely based on commercial assessments.

In his report *Much more than a market*, Enrico Letta says that public procurement should be a key instrument for promoting social value, enhancing social capital, and aligning with the EU's ambitions for green and digital transformations. He further argues that prioritising these aspects would ensure that public

expenditures contribute positively towards these objectives[13]. Investing in a thorough preparation and realisation of quality-based decision processes like an architectural design competition at the beginning of the project also shows economically advantageous effects throughout the whole project.

To implement such goals beyond architecture's constructive aspects, architects have to come up with plans that are specific to each project's requirements while implementing concepts based on constantly changing societal frameworks and technologies. The architectural design competition, therefore, is an ideal instrument for procurers for receiving a variety of solutions to objectives interwoven with a multitude of societal aspects. To create a suitable framework for tendering architectural services, a specific chapter on procuring intellectual services that takes into special account architectural design competitions is recommended.

## 2. Quality-Based Procurement through ADCs | The Principle of Best Solution as Opposed to Lowest Price Offer

Procurement procedures are designed to obtain the 'most economically advantageous tender'. This is explicitly stipulated in the Public Procurement Directive. It is acknowledged that 'ambiguities' are inherent in the use of this principle as an award criterion (see Directive, Explanatory Memorandum, paragraph 89), and therefore it is proposed to consider the formulation 'best value for money'.

For the procurement of goods, it may be sensible to assess the ratio of the value of the goods to the purchase price, but not for services, intellectual and especially architectural services, which must be focused on quality. What constitutes economically 'most advantageous' can, for example, only be determined to a limited extent during or prior to the procurement process for architectural planning services, as any architectural or urban design also has social and ecological impacts with economic implications. Paragraph 89 of the Explanatory Memorandum to the Directive and all subordinate provisions of the Directive and national procurement laws should therefore be amended as follows:

[13] Enrico Letta, *Much more than a market*, April 2024, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf

If the award criteria are based on the overarching concept of the 'most economically advantageous tender' or 'best value for money', macroeconomic and social effects reaching beyond the limits of the calculation for an individual project should also be taken into account when considering the quality of the goods to be procured or the services to be provided.

Chapter 2 of this White Paper shows that quality and cost efficiency are no contrast. On the contrary, the analysis of data of completed ADCs came to the result that in an overwhelming majority of ADCs the quality-based decisions led to selecting architectural concepts that turned out to be the economically most advantageous projects. Detailed information on it can be found on pages 26–41.

## 3. Guaranteeing Qualified, Impartial, and Independent ADC Juries

If a specific professional qualification is required of the architects participating in the ADC, a majority of the members of the jury should possess the same or equivalent qualifications. These members of the jury should be independent of the client as experts.

Jury members must not have a conflict of interest with the competitors. Only individuals who have previously declared to the client that they will not accept any contract related to the project in question may be appointed to the jury.

The jury may only consist of individuals who are independent of the architects participating in the competition. Architects' professional organisations should be involved in the selection process for the constitution of the jury. Appointing the same architects regularly in one region should be avoided.

International jury members should be appointed whenever possible, particularly in juries of ADCs, where considerable participation by architects from abroad is expected. This promotes openness towards international participants and helps to avoid partiality and collusion.

## 4. Defining ADCs as the Default Procurement Procedure for Architectural Design

Except for Specific Projects Requiring Other Forms of Procurement | Procurement law should stress that the default procedure for public clients to procure architectural designs should follow an open[14] ADC. The obligation to organise an ADC should be extended to the private sector for projects of general importance and projects in sensible locations in the urban context or natural landscape.

The ARCH-E consortium recognises the need for country-specific solutions to the obligation to organise ADCs due to different contexts. Obligations to organise an ADC may be bound to places and tasks of special public interest, in terms of their urban, architectural, social, cultural, ecological, or economic relevance.

Below are examples of how some countries are already pursuing or have already fulfilled this goal by means of investment thresholds:

**Austria** | A special feature of the Austrian ADC system is that a large part of the state investments is managed by BIG (Bundesimmobiliengesellschaft m.b.H. ~ Federal Real Estate Company), which is owned by the state. Article 4 of the BIG Act (*Bundesimmobiliengesetz*)15 states that an anonymous ADC must be organised for all new buildings above a threshold value of approximately 5 million euros.

**France** | The state and its public establishments are obliged to organise an ADC if the estimated fees amount exceeds € 144,000 excluding VAT. For local authorities the threshold is € 221,000 excluding VAT. The threshold only applies for the planning and construction of new buildings; refurbishments are excluded.

**Germany** | §78 (2) VGV demands for public procurers: 'The contracting authority checks whether a design competition should be held for tasks in

[14] In cases of extraordinary special programmes requiring specific skills from the architects, the qualification criteria can be a suitable instrument. As explained in recommendation 10, the proof of qualification should be required from the winning architect after the decision of the jury and the possibility of *Eignungsleihe* should be granted to guarantee the ADC's accessibility.

[15] Rechtsinformationssystem des Bundes, 'Bundesrecht konsolidert, Bundesimmobiliengesetz § 4, Fassung von 04.04.2024', https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/NormDokument.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20001062&FassungVom=2024-04-04&Artikel=&Paragraf=4&Anlage=&Uebergangsrecht=

building, urban and bridge construction as well as in landscape and open space planning and documents its decision'.

**Hungary** | ACT CXLIII on Public Procurement obliges the public procurer to organise an ADC for complex public projects when the defined investment threshold value is reached.

**Slovakia** | The Public Procurement Law obliges contracting authorities to use an ADC if it concerns a service contract in the field of urban planning, architecture, civil engineering, or data processing, with an estimated value equal to or higher than the financial threshold according to § 5 para. 2, which defines the values for above-threshold contracts. Since August 2024 the threshold for central government authorities has been set at € 143,000 excluding VAT, and for other public contracting authorities (such as local governments) at € 221,000 excluding VAT.

**Slovenia** | Above the threshold investment value of EUR 2,500,000 for new public facilities (and EUR 500,000 for open space sport / recreational areas), or if the use of land (bigger than five hectares) is intended to be changed, the Public Procurement Act in Slovenia / *Zakon o Javnem Naročanju* (ZJN-3) obliges public procurers to organise an ADC for the design of public facilities.

**Spain** – Catalonia | The Catalonia Law 12/2017 on Architecture (Articles 12 and 18) obliges the public procurer to organise an ADC for architectural services with an estimated fee value of € 60,000 or more for new construction, rehabilitation, or renovation.

## 5. Committing Procurers to Thoroughly Prepare an ADC and to Realise the Project

Too often no planning services are awarded and the project will not be realised after the termination of an ADC. Most of the reasons for that can be avoided by extensive and high-quality preparation of the competition. Therefore, the following points should be checked before starting the competition process:

- the investment cost for a project should be fully financed
- ambiguities regarding land use should be ruled out
- the ownership of the construction plot should be secured
- the planning programme, with clearly formulated goals and evaluation criteria, should be thoroughly prepared

To minimise the risks that an ADC is held without awarding the promised planning services and realising the project, the ARCH-E consortium recommends establishing mechanisms that ensure the quality of the competition brief. In addition to the risks mentioned above, special attention should be paid to formulating the programme requirements on order to exclude subsequent changes.

To avoid negligence in preparing the ADC brief, local architects' chambers or professional ADC organisers should already be involved in the preparatory phase leading up to an ADC. The approaches for checking the quality of the ADC brief can vary. In Austria, for example, the architects' chambers check the quality of the brief and the feasibility of the project within the framework of so-called Cooperated ADCs. These cooperated competitions allow the Federal and, particularly, the Regional Chambers to ensure that adequate project development, if necessary, with preliminary studies, is carried out and that the Austrian competition standards (WSA 2010) are applied.

In Slovenia a similar system is mandatory for all competitions organised by ZAPS. Clients must prepare a brief in accordance with the ZAPS Instructions for creating competition briefs[16]. The ZAPS competition service then checks the structural quality of the ADC brief and the feasibility of the project. The

[16] Zbornica za arhitekturo in prostor Slovenije, 'Navodila za pripravo natečajnih gradiv', January 2022, https://zaps.si/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Navodila-za-izdelavo-natecajnih-nalog.pdf

result of this quality control of the brief is that for 90% of the ADCs in the last ten years, the contract for project documentation is signed, and of that, 99% with the winner.

## 6. A Binding Commitment by the Procurer to Commission the ADC Winner

Winning an ADC does not guarantee a commission. Responses to the ARCH-E survey conducted in October 2024 in more than 20 EU member countries show that among those who had won a first prize in an ADC abroad, only 35% could secure the contract for the project resulting from the ADC[17]. Participating in an ADC is often seen as an investment not only to have the chance of winning the prize money but to secure a significant commission for an architectural office. The ARCH-E consortium recommends obliging procurers to make a binding commitment to commission the ADC winner. If the project cannot be realised due to force majeure despite thorough preparation, the awarding authority can be obliged to pay an indemnity to the first prize-winner.

Currently, the Article 32(4) of the Public Procurement Directive (PRD) stands in contrast to the principle that procurers should commission ADC winners with the implementation of the winner project. Formally, all prize-winners of an ADC are considered candidates for awarding the planning services subject to procurement. There is no formal commitment for the client to award the contract to the ADC winner. The contracting entity may award contracts in the negotiated procedure without competitive tender where, following an ADC, a service contract is to be awarded under the rules provided for in the contest to the winner or one of the winners; in the latter case, all winners of the contest must be invited to participate in the negotiations. This contrasts with the intention of jury decisions clearly defining a first prize-winner, whose project is usually recommended unanimously to be realised. The ARCH-E consortium recommends amending the above article to clarify that procurers may negotiate exclusively with the ADC-winner and make it possible for procurers to directly commission the competition winner without a negotiation process. Chapter 2 of this White Paper analyses the economy of ADCs and shows that ADC procedures pose no economic risk

[17] Dr. Eva M. Álvarez Isidro, Dr. Carlos J. Gómez Alfonso, *ARCH-E Architects' Needs Report*, 2025, https://www.arch-e.eu/files/Architects-Needs-Report_EN_v2.pdf

in comparison with negotiated forms of procurement. In some cases, they can even be significantly more cost efficient, while additionally guaranteeing quality-based architectural decisions.

In Germany and Switzerland, the current regulations RPW 2013 (Germany) and SIA 142/143 (Switzerland) commit clients to award planning services when choosing an ADC before a procurement procedure.

Only in case of serious reasons, e.g., commissioning the ADC winner fails because the winner of the design competition does not meet the eligibility requirements or negotiations on deadlines, budget framework, etc. do not produce a result, the negotiated procedure should continue with the other prize-winners of the ADC in cascading order.

ADCs can be an important stepping stone for SMEs to enter new markets. As the investment of participating in an ADC is much bigger in proportion than for large offices, increasing the probability of a commission is all the more relevant for SMEs.

**Supporting SMEs to Enter the European Market**

## 7. No Economic Criteria to Participate in ADCs

Architectural Design Competitions are an important stepping stone for young offices when entering the market. Economic criteria for participation in ADCs are in most cases an insurmountable obstacle for young architects and SMEs.

In the ARCH-E Architects' Needs Survey, architects working in SMEs ranked turnover thresholds that have to be met in order to be eligible to participate in an ADC as the third most obstructive issue for them.

High-quality architectural solutions can be designed by all architects regardless of their previous economic performance; therefore it is recommended to completely forego economic participation requirements. A direct positive side effect would be an improved accessibility for SMEs and thus creating great potential for innovation.

## 8. No Reference Projects to Participate in ADCs

By default no reference projects should be required to participate in an ADC. Only if the ADC searches for exceptionally special concepts and specific skills are needed to realise this programme, public clients should be able to ask for references in proportion to the according programme. These references should reflect skills rather than experience, quantity, and scale, not to exclude SMEs and/or young offices just entering the market.

Reference projects should not be limited to projects that were realised within a few years prior to the participation in the ADC and they should be defined wide enough to leave access sufficiently open. Otherwise, large offices are favoured without significant benefits for the selection process.

## 9. Limiting the Required Depth of Elaboration for ADC Entries

Experts assess the average time spent by an architectural office to participate in an ADC at 400 hours[18] with peaks of up to 1,000 hours. Data gathered by ZAPS in Slovenia found that the cost for developing one ADC entry was approximately EUR 15,000 for an office[19]. A high level of elaboration is widely assumed unnecessary to assess the quality of an architectural design in an ADC and therefore causes work hours that could easily be avoided without compromising on procedural accuracy.

Limiting the required depth of elaboration to a proportionate level according to the programme would attract more architects to participate in ADCs, providing the procurers with more solutions to the ADC question. A high number of participants results in positive effects for clients like greater social acceptance of the final project, emerging trends and patterns among proposals that support better-informed decisions, and a higher probability of identifying an exceptionally strong or innovative solution. At the same time, less effort would be required by SMEs in comparison to their office resources, improving their competitiveness with large offices. On a macroeconomic level, high levels of required depth of elaboration bind resources that otherwise could be invested productively.

18 Based on a survey and according reports by Nikolaus Hellmayr for BKZT in 2024.

19 Statistics gathered by ZAPS for ADCs in the years 2019–2023, estimation of cost by architectural offices.

Part C of the Austrian WSA 2010 advises limiting the depth of elaboration to

- a site plan at a scale of 1:500,
- floor plans at a scale of 1:200,
- sections at a scale of 1:200,
- elevations at a scale of 1:200,
- a textual explanation of the competition entry,
- area and volume figures required for the evaluation of the plans | e.g., by built-up area, usable area, gross floor area, facade area, gross volume,
- building mass model at a scale of 1:500 | three-dimensional representation of the building in an abstract, simple form.

The more detailed elaboration of individual aspects may be necessary due to the project-specific requirements but should always be weighed up by ADC organisers in the interests of proportionality. The depth of elaboration must allow the jury to recognise a concept's quality and to make an objectifiable decision. At the same time the depth of elaboration should not exceed this goal by requiring exuberant details.

Some ADCs require participating architects to include calculations and certificates that cannot reliably be done for plans at the required depth of elaboration. Instead of creating such administrative burden, it is recommended to define goals in the brief that the winner of an ADC commits to meet in the final design for a project if she/he wins the first prize and is subsequently commissioned. Furthermore, the jury may seek specific council from experts in specialised fields (commissioned by the client). These experts provide only an advisory role.

## 10. Anonymity of the Entries Throughout the ADC Procedure

The anonymity of the participants and their entries throughout the procedure is one of the main columns of fair and transparent ADCs.

Article 82, paragraph 5 of the Directive 2014/25/EU stipulates a dialogue between competition participants and the jury. In specific cases this may lead

to problems in maintaining anonymity during the competition process. An amendment to paragraph 5 is recommended. Dialogue between the procurer and competition participants should continue to be possible, subject to strict observance of anonymity, but should not be mandatory.

In some cases, predefined qualification criteria can contrast with maintaining anonymity in addition to restricting accessibility to SMEs. The criteria therefore should be proportionate to the level of complexity of and required skills for the given architecture programme. The proof of qualification should only be checked after the decision of the jury. If the winner cannot fulfil all criteria, she/he should be given the possibility to fulfil it through means of an *Eignungsleihe*[20] (a literal translation would be 'borrowing qualification') or similar regulatory instruments. Similar procedures exist in varying forms in several other countries – a uniform solution would be desirable. It would allow ADC winners to cooperate with other offices in order to meet the required criteria of qualification once they won the ADC. This would reduce the administrative burden for all ADC participants, as only the winner would have to prove their qualification and in case find suitable cooperation partners. Amending the existing article 63 in the Directive 2014/24/EU concerning the timing of the qualification would suffice.

Participatory processes including the perspectives of future users and citizens are recognised as valuable instruments. With careful planning, participatory processes and anonymity can both be realised in open ADCs. ADC organisers are advised to start processes that include stakeholders like engaged citizens, future users, and other interest groups relevant to the construction area or the future use of the building early in the preparation leading up to the formulation of the ADC brief and the following call for entries.

[20] In Germany the legal framework of the *Eignungsleihe* is defined by the Vergabeverordnung (VgV) § 47. The VgV not only applies to ADCs but to public procurement in general.

### ▶ Addition to the Recommendations: Lowering Language Barriers

Even though language barriers rank among the most obstructive for architects working on cross-border projects, the ARCH-E consortium recommends holding a competition by default in one and in most cases in the local language. If clients seek to attract ADC participants from abroad, they are advised to organise the ADC in English. Allowing only one competition language aims at guaranteeing the anonymity of the ADC. To facilitate architects' participation in ADCs abroad, ARCH-E recommends providing the competition brief in addition to the local language in English or to provide it in a digital format that can easily be translated by automated systems. Moreover, ARCH-E provides a network that allows architects to find local partners to bridge the language gap and possible knowledge gaps concerning country-specific regulations. The ARCH-E Glossary is another helpful tool to mitigate the language barriers and will be expanded in the upcoming year.

# CHAPTER 2

## Data on the Economic Efficiency of Architectural Design Competitions

# Data on the Economic Efficiency of Architectural Design Competitions

**ABSTRACT** | Architectural design competitions (ADCs) are often perceived as costly and inefficient. However, a detailed analysis of 40 ADCs demonstrates their significant economic benefits, particularly for public sector clients. The study reveals that competition-winning projects, selected through qualitative evaluation, not only deliver superior architectural and functional quality but also lead to substantial reductions in gross floor area (GFA) and construction costs. When comparing the procedural costs of competitions, typically around 0.7% of construction costs, with the potential savings, we see an amortisation rate of up to 32. Unlike negotiated procedures which often lack a well-defined planning basis, ADCs offer a transparent, comparative process that ensures the best possible solution is identified and implemented. The qualitative depth, diversity of solutions, and independent, anonymous jury evaluations result in projects with lower operating and life cycle costs. For small municipalities and inexperienced public clients, competitions mitigate risks associated with inadequate planning assumptions. The study refutes the common narrative that quality architecture is a luxury, demonstrating that design excellence and economic efficiency are not contradictory, but mutually reinforcing. ADCs emerge as a vital, democratic, and cost-effective procurement tool.

Competitions have a reputation for being expensive, time-consuming, and therefore uneconomical. However, the opposite is true when comparing the economic figures of competitive projects. Clients are generally unaware

that awarding a planning contract without differentiated clarification of the qualitative principles, which only a competition can provide, harbours enormous risks and generates billions in avoidable expenditure every year in the case of public construction projects.

The commission of planning services based on the principle of the best price, determined quickly in a negotiated procedure, appear appropriate, conclusive, and economically justifiable in comparison to a complex competitive procedure. What the negotiated procedure lacks, however, is the substantive basis of the service to be provided to which the price offer refers. As a rule, price and performance are not related to each other on a verified, qualitative level. There is no comprehensive idea of the project content and parameters in negotiated procedures. This is a high risk for clients with little experience, not least in terms of the costs over the entire life cycle of a building.

In the competition, project content and key data are precisely determined, professionally assessed and weighed up in a comparison of the different planning concepts. If we forego this comparison of content-related qualities, we not only forego building culture and spaces with high functionality and quality of stay. We also fail to realise a savings potential in terms of construction and follow-up costs.

If we systematically analyse the key data of projects that have been submitted, examined, and evaluated in architectural design competitions (ADCs) according to economic efficiency criteria, we can derive the following theses and findings based on the range of these data and, in particular, by comparing the gross floor area (GFA) of the first-ranked project with the other competing projects:

11. Every project is a potential solution for the tendered construction task. We achieve quality in terms of building culture, value of the built environment, and functional coherence by comparing and evaluating design variants of different quality. However, **the variety of proposed solutions** in an ADC also gives us a precise overview of economic parameters and their distribution and scope.

12. The qualitative range of the design concepts is essentially derived from the factors of urban planning, architecture, and functionality. Economic performance is closely correlated with these factors, for example, in the sense of a consistently implemented spatial and functional programme **in high-quality, efficiently organised floor plans**.

13. **The range of possible construction costs** can be calculated on the basis of the cost parameters used by the client when preparing the project and the GFA determined during the review of the planning concepts submitted. Other qualitative factors of the competition projects provide at least an idea of the operating and follow-up costs over the useful life of the building.

    The calculation of costs on the basis of parameters from the project preparation and the competition reflects the **client's risk** in the event of an order and makes no or only a relative statement about the actual costs of the realised project. However, in our view, the cost estimate derived from project parameters represents a valid and best possible cost estimate at the time of the competition decision. The actual costs depend on the results of further planning after commissioning and a large number of other parameters such as market conditions, realisation conditions, method of use, etc.

14. **In terms of economic efficiency factors**, the top-ranked projects are generally in the top third of all submitted projects, in most cases even better than the average value resulting from the comparison of the GFA totals of all projects.

15. On average, the **competition costs** amount to approx. 0.7% of the construction costs determined on the basis of the first-ranked project. The positive cost effects of competitions are on average 18.8 times higher in terms of reduced construction costs.

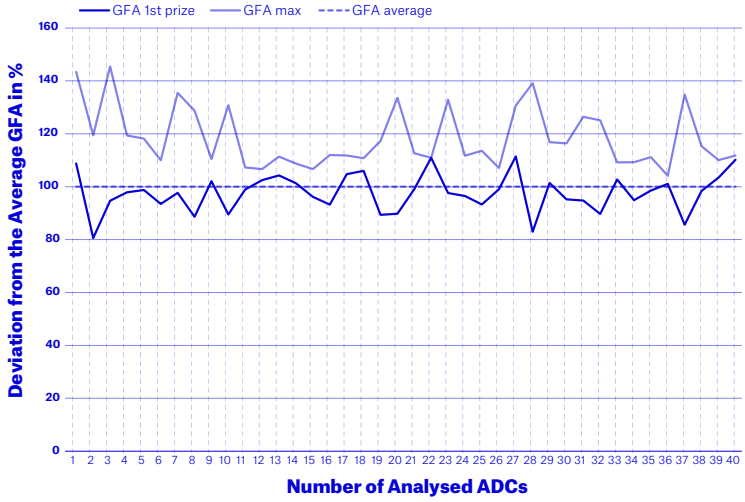
A study conducted as part of ARCH-E has now confirmed the aforementioned theses on the basis of 40 architectural competitions. It illustrates the economic potential of ADCs for clients by comparing the GFA analyses of all competition projects and the resulting construction costs. The actual competition costs, which are compared with the calculated construction costs or the savings effects, show a degree of amortisation of the competition that exceeds the average potential cost savings in construction costs alone by a factor of more than 18. To put it more simply: a client who puts a project out to tender via an architectural design competition gets an average 18-fold return on the procedural costs through reduced construction costs; in the worst-risk scenario, the factor is more than 32-fold.

Before we turn to the specific data of the study, it should be noted that in the EU

countries participating in ARCH-E alone, around 1148 competitions[21] are held each year, mainly for public building projects, whereby only the procedures organised by chambers and other public institutions are taken into account. If we calculate at least twice the number of architectural competitions for the entire EU area, the potential savings in construction costs alone could be estimated at more than 28 billion euros. Unfortunately, only a fraction of projects are realised through ADCs. The ACE Sector Study 2024 estimates the total value of the construction market in the EUROPE 32 at approximately 2600 billion euros. If ADCs would be used more often as a procurement form, the potential is vast.

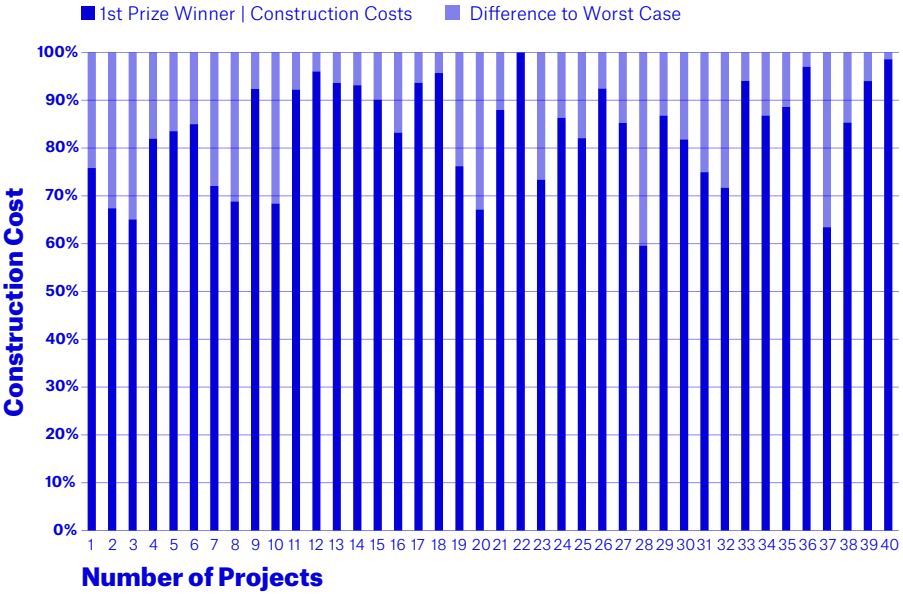
# The Results of the Study at a Glance

The 40 competitions analysed cover a wide range of predominantly public building projects. The evaluation includes small projects, such as an exhibition building with the smallest GFA of 783 m², or fire stations and community centres with floor space totals of around 2,500 m², through to large projects such as educational buildings, residential buildings, and administrative centres, among which a hospital with 156,583 m² GFA provides the maximum floor space balance.



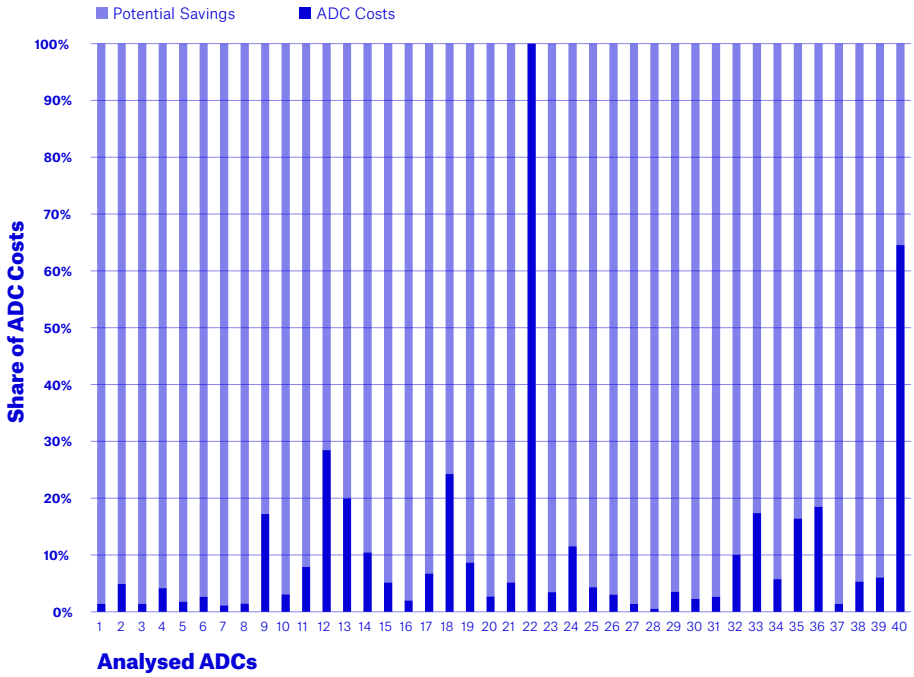

[21] See Juliette Bekkering, Torsten Schröder, Grazia Tona | Eindhoven University of Technology, Department of the Built Environment, Architectural Design and Engineering, *The ARCH-E Map on ADCs*, p. 24, https://arch-e.eu/maps-on-adcs

The construction costs were calculated on the basis of the client's parameters, which formed the basis for the competition briefs. The total sum of all 40 projects amounts to around 2.5 billion euros based on the calculated construction costs of the first-prize-winning projects. The calculation, which reflects the maximum client risk, i.e., a comparison of the GFA sums of the award-winning projects with the projects with the maximum GFA sums, shows an average reduction in construction costs of 18.3 %, or a total of 571 million euros. This statement applies to 39 of the 40 competitions analysed. A comparison of the award-winning projects with the respective average value of the GFA sums shows a reduction in construction costs of approximately 3.5 %, still a sum of approx. 92 million euros or slightly more than five times the procedural costs, whereby a cost reduction compared to the average solutions was determined in 26 of the 40 competitions.




The competition costs range from 96,000 to 2.9 million euros or between 0.24 and 4.4% of the calculated construction costs. For large projects, the costs for an open competition are generally less than 1% of the construction costs. This also applies to two complex, two-stage general planning competitions with procedural costs of over 2 million euros, which account for only 0.8 to 0.9% of the construction costs. Invited competitions for projects in the sub-threshold range are significantly less economical; here the procedural costs

can reach 5% of the construction sum and the potential for cost reductions is also significantly lower due to the small number of projects in the competition. Nevertheless, the basic conclusion of the study can also be confirmed for small projects, namely that organising an architectural competition is significantly more economical overall than awarding contracts in other forms. In the scope of the present study, which takes greater account of medium-sized and larger public construction projects, the competition costs average around 0.7% of the construction sum.




## Interpretation of the Examination Results

The GFA and the construction costs calculated on the basis of the parameters used by the client for the first-prize-winners, i.e., the projects that submitted the best proposal for realising the planning task, are compared on the one hand with the parameters of those projects that show the maximum GFA. This comparison represents the worst-risk scenario, i.e., the client's maximum risk in relation to the calculated construction costs. On the other hand, the data of the award-winning projects are compared with an average value calculated

from the GFA totals of all projects submitted in the respective competition. The informative value of this comparison is debatable; it is made for reasons of custom and caution. However, if the majority of the award-winning designs in competitions are still more favourable in comparison with average values despite various inconsistent factors, this once again clearly underlines the effectiveness of architectural design competitions in connection with the influence of planning quality on the economic management of the overall project in question.

The average values are a mathematical solution based not only on a specific project, but on all projects. However, statistical distortions can misrepresent the overall results if all parameters are taken into account when calculating a cross-section. Projects with the smallest GFA and other projects with solutions that appear very compact often show serious deficiencies in the fulfilment of the spatial and functional programme or in the verification of the necessary construction areas. If projects with serious space deficits were excluded from the calculation, the GFA average would be higher overall and thus the economic statement on the top-ranked projects would be even more positive.

With the maximum values, however, the situation is clear. These values are each based on a specific design proposal, which could theoretically also be realised as a specific project. The high GFA values are the result of specific design decisions, such as inconsistently developed floor plans with high proportions of development and construction space. In addition, these projects show other deficiencies that can be attributed to the high utilisation of space, such as problems with orientation in the building, lighting deficits, deviations from fire protection specifications, etc. It goes without saying that projects in this category also generate corresponding operating and maintenance costs and are therefore significantly less economical than the study calculates in terms of construction costs alone.

However, there is another, more significant argument to be made against the comparison of the first-ranked project with average values. We are too hasty in assuming that the award of a planning contract via a negotiated procedure will at least result in an average project. Which planning team that has already been awarded the contract without having prevailed in competition with other offices with a consistently elaborated design concept will develop the ambition to go beyond the minimum requirements in the fulfilment of the contract? What advantage do the commissioned planners gain if they undercut the budget

envisaged by the client? The practice of lowest bidder procedures, total and general contractor awards shows sufficiently that the planning quality and efficiency in the implementation of the spatial and functional programme remain consistently moderate, and the budgets are, if not exceeded, at least used up.

Now, we cannot and must not assume that the client will necessarily receive the worst conceivable project if he foregoes an architectural design competition, which would have provided him with an optimal planning solution and all the relevant bases to enter into negotiations. However, the fact that clients could comfortably settle for the average, because we assume that everything ultimately always boils down to a mean value, stems from a simplified understanding of the stochastic law of large numbers. The law states that with a large number of similar processes that only allow two different outcomes, e.g., success and failure, the statistics of all outcomes level off at a mean value and are increasingly less dependent on chance[22]. However, the award of a planning contract is not an event that can be repeated many times; even negotiating with several bidders does not provide a sufficiently distributed number of cases to achieve the theoretical mean value as a result. For public clients, at least in smaller municipalities, the planning of a school or community centre is always a singular event that cannot be repeated and is not based on experience or sufficient specialist knowledge[23]. In the reality of the construction industry, this singularity and this lack of experience and knowledge are usually penalised with higher costs. The probability of receiving the worst possible project is significantly higher than achieving a statistical mean value, as the negotiation conditions are not geared towards a possible optimum.

An open ADC is different. It aims to maximise the number of entries, which should cover the entire range of possible solutions. The principle of the Austrian ADC standard – WSA 2010*[24] applies, according to which ‘quality

22 An example of this would be tossing a coin. If the coin is tossed a sufficient number of times, the distribution of the results will be based on the mean value according to the Gaussian normal distribution.

23 An example from the field of educational construction: According to Statistics Austria, there were 13 more primary schools in three Austrian federal states in the 2023/24 school year than in the 2022/23 school year. 11 of these schools are in the city of Vienna, two in the federal states of Lower Austria and Salzburg. The number of schools in the remaining federal states remained the same or declined due to school closures. So let’s say: the city of Vienna has experience in building schools, the rest of Austria doesn’t really. See Statistik Austria, ‘Schulen und Klassen’, https://www.statistik.at/statistiken/bevoelkerung-und-soziales/bildung/schulbesuch/schulen-und-klassen

24 See Bundeskammer der Ziviltechniker:innen (ed.): *Wettbewerbsstandard Architektur WSA 2010**, Part A, Article II, Para. 8, p. 12, https://www.architekturwettbewerb.at/wsa

is generated from diversity' and a normal distribution of qualities can only be established with a corresponding number and breadth of solutions. We are not reliant on speculating on an average project based on the principle of chance. Instead, the aim is to find the optimum solution to the construction task by having the various concepts examined and evaluated by a competent jury of experts. Two further factors allow ADCs to achieve solution-orientated results compared to negotiated procedures. On the one hand, the quality of competition designs is based on a precise definition of the task, as well as objectifiable planning principles and assessment criteria. On the other hand, the jury, which is constituted of independent experts and representatives of the client, makes its decisions on the basis of anonymously submitted concepts. The principle of anonymity guarantees objectivity, impartiality, and impenetrability in the assessment of the factual, solution-orientated qualities of the designs. As a result, the top-ranked projects are always above average in all key parameters, as the study shows, including at least one third of the best projects in terms of the 'economic efficiency' factor.

The comparison of the GFA values of the first-ranked project with the average value merely illustrates the economic performance of award-winning competition projects in relation to the overall distribution of the solution concepts. The comparison with the maximum GFA values, on the other hand, defines the economic leeway and the real contract risk of the client who forgoes a competition, as well as the economic potential that can be derived from the results of architectural competitions.

## The Perspective of Public Clients

Commissioning planning services is not necessarily part of everyday business for public institutions, especially in small municipalities, and is not always handled with a sure hand. Particularly in the case of construction tasks with very specialised requirements, for example in education or healthcare, there is a lack of routine, knowledge, and professional structures to ensure the qualities that should be a matter of course if public funds are used carefully.

Public facilities have a primary obligation to people. This social obligation implies a commitment to user-friendly quality, high-quality spatial atmospheres, compliance with sustainable environmental standards, etc. The self-image of public clients should reflect this holistic perspective and

include the design and functional qualities, user-friendliness, and durability in relation to the entire life cycle of the building when considering cost-effectiveness. In this sense, ADCs are the appropriate mode, delivering the required qualities and at the same time democratically legitimised in terms of the procurement process. This study confirms that awarding public planning tasks without quality-orientated procedures can also be classified as economically negligent. In principle, economic efficiency cannot be limited to planning and construction costs, not even to life cycle costs, but must also be assessed in the context of cost effects resulting from the quality of the spaces for people and the environment.

We want to emphasise the economic advantages that arise for clients from the implementation of a competition from a holistic perspective and that are ignored in other forms of procurement:

1. The first-prize-winning project in an architectural design competition delivers maximum architectural and functional quality from the outset. A clever arrangement of the usable areas and traffic routes and the creation of possible area synergies are reflected in good characteristic values. In addition, however, excellently designed floor plans mean a quality of use, user-friendliness, and sustainability achieved over the entire service life of the building, which can also be categorised economically (e.g., fewer sick days of satisfied employees, etc.).

2. The client can recognise in the competition that different planning approaches generate different space requirements. If the first-ranked project is correspondingly more compact than projects that are rated less highly, the quality-based project selection gives the client a corresponding economic advantage, which results from the reduction in space requirements and can be calculated precisely.

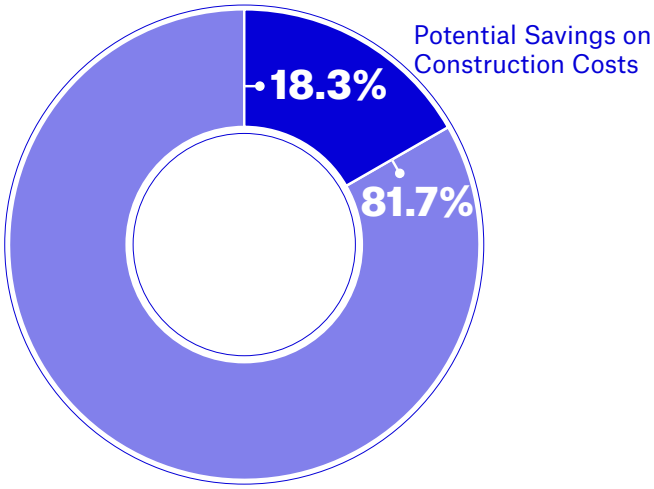
3. The compact solution saves construction costs. However, compactness is not a value in itself. However, rationally organised floor plans result in rooms with a high quality of stay. There are positive effects in terms of orientation in the building, the length of the access routes, the extent of the envelope surfaces, the enclosed space, and thus the ongoing operating and maintenance costs.

4. The client can compare the space parameters of the project determined as the best solution in the competition with the space parameters that were determined in advance as part of the competition preparation and on which the spatial and functional programme is based. If this comparison results in a reduction in GFA compared to the client's original space calculation, this also represents a precisely calculable economic advantage.

5. Last but not least, the best preliminary design concept is also the basis for implementation with a minimised ecological footprint. This results in savings in terms of the built-up area, i.e., the degree of sealing of the plot, energy requirements, and circular economy.

In principle, it must be considered under what conditions the client would have commissioned the planning in question if the planning service had only been awarded via a negotiated procedure instead of an ADC. It can be assumed that the best preliminary design concept in comparison with other projects would not have been available as a basis for negotiation, but only the functional and economic assumptions that the client itself had made in advance. If these assumptions are incorrect, for example, due to a lack of experience, no corrective intervention will take place in a negotiation procedure. Therefore, if the client decides not to organise an architectural design competition when awarding planning services, it not only foregoes building culture, but also foregoes alternative solutions, the comparison of which with its own calculations is the only way to assess the economic viability of the project in concrete terms.

If the planning contract for a complex building is awarded on the basis of inadequately examined technical principles, the aforementioned potentials are not even considered. Without a preliminary design concept with the appropriate degree of elaboration that only an ADC can provide, there is simply a lack of awareness of all the parameters that are relevant either immediately in terms of effectively calculated construction costs or in the cost framework over the entire life cycle of the building.




## Conclusions: The Economics of the Best Solution or the Reversal of a False Narrative

The current praxis of awarding planning contracts is characterised by the avoidance and restriction of quality-orientated competition. Awarding contracts purely through negotiated procedures without a qualitative component and restrictive participation criteria does not do justice to the fragmented structure of the European architecture scene[25]. Not only are we foregoing high-quality solutions, but we are also systematically hindering the next generation of architects and devaluing their outstanding level of training, which they use to contribute the latest scientific findings, innovative solutions, and creative potential to professional praxis.

The study on the economic viability of architectural design competitions makes it clear that the common narrative that high-quality architecture should be avoided as an expensive luxury is wrong. It is wrong simply because people believe that by negotiating a favourable planning fee, they have already acquired an economically optimised project overall. In addition to the economic aspects, this erroneous conclusion ignores essential parameters, including the societal and ecological consequences of wrong planning decisions.

[25] The Architects' Council of Europe/Mirza & Nacey Research Ltd, *The Architectural Profession in Europe 2024 Sector Study*, p. 35.

The assumption that the process itself, i.e., the architectural competition, is uneconomical is also unfounded. In any case, we are within the discount range of the calculated construction costs for medium-sized and larger construction projects, and the process immediately amortises itself in many ways.

Through the filter of economic analysis, we also recognise the efficiency with which architecture can contribute to tackling the problems facing society through the high-quality selection processes of competitions. We see innovation, technical excellence, and an efficiency and rationality that we should recognise and value as the viable economics of the best solution.

Long-term crises in the global economy and climate change cannot be solved by the cheapest bidder principle. We need quality and the best solutions that actually work in the long term in order to survive as a society. As an open, democratic society, we in Europe need a public procurement law that is absolutely geared towards the quality that emerges from serious competitions and places the people who can deliver this quality at the centre of its efforts. In this respect, the false narrative that the best price-performance ratio can be gained from bargain offers should be reversed for reasons of democratic honesty.

For data protection reasons, the collected project data were anonymised by the analysis team for publication.

| Project - Typology | GFA min. | GFA max. | GFA Ø | GFA 1st Prize | Diff. 1st Prize to GFA max. | €/m2 GFA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Education/Culture | 17,700 | 29,400 | 20,500 | 22,300 | 7,100 | 2,400.00 |
| Education/Administration | 2,600 | 4,300 | 3,600 | 2,900 | 1,400 | 2,500.00 |
| Education | 11,400 | 19,200 | 13,200 | 12,500 | 6,700 | 2,100.00 |
| Education | 7,100 | 11,100 | 9,300 | 9,100 | 2,000 | 1,500.00 |
| Education | 19,500 | 28,600 | 24,200 | 23,900 | 4,700 | 2,600.00 |
| Education | 18,300 | 22,000 | 20,000 | 18,700 | 3,300 | 2,000.00 |
| Education | 25,300 | 40,500 | 29,900 | 29,200 | 11,300 | 2,700.00 |
| urban commercial building | 14,100 | 21,500 | 16,700 | 14,800 | 6,700 | 2,800.00 |
| urban commercial building | 2,200 | 2,750 | 2,490 | 2,540 | 210 | 2,300.00 |
| Student-Housing | 2,650 | 5,350 | 4,090 | 3,660 | 1,690 | 2,900.00 |
| Firestation/Crisis & Control Center | 12,146 | 14,956 | 13,941 | 13,798 | 1158 | 5,900.00 |
| Community Center | 2,725 | 3,296 | 3,090 | 3,166 | 130 | 4,600.00 |
| Welcome-Center / Park-Gastronomy | 2,819 | 3,430 | 3,080 | 3,211 | 219 | 4,300.00 |
| Firestation | 2,712 | 3,224 | 2,966 | 3,004 | 220 | 5,100.00 |
| Education | 24,938 | 28,592 | 26,804 | 25,770 | 2,822 | 4,300.00 |
| Education | 26,101 | 32,418 | 28,942 | 26,984 | 5,434 | 4,300.00 |
| Administration | 40,245 | 52,063 | 46,582 | 48,780 | 3,283 | 2,900.00 |
| Community Center+Fire Station | 2,751 | 3,532 | 3,188 | 3,380 | 152 | 3,700.00 |
| Community Center | 1,028 | 1,349 | 1,150 | 1,028 | 321 | 4,600.00 |
| Education | 3,122 | 4,681 | 3,503 | 3,144 | 1537 | 4,300.00 |
| Student Housing/Adminstration/ Gastronomy | 20,834 | 24,573 | 21,819 | 21,619 | 2954 | 2,900.00 |
| Adminstration/Culture | 18,462 | 23,014 | 20,749 | 23,014 | 0 | 2,900.00 |
| Fire Station | 1,448 | 2,198 | 1,654 | 1,614 | 584 | 4,600.00 |
| Administration | 1,375 | 1,646 | 1,473 | 1,421 | 225 | 4,600.00 |
| Housing | 8,092 | 10,719 | 9,436 | 8,800 | 1,919 | 2,600.00 |
| Administration | 47,589 | 55,975 | 52,274 | 51,750 | 4,225 | 2,900.00 |
| Student Housing | 16,126 | 28,088 | 21,496 | 23,956 | 4132 | 2,600.00 |
| Fire station center | 9,900 | 16,600 | 11,933 | 9,900 | 6700 | 5,100.00 |
| Community Center | 3,495 | 5,177 | 4,432 | 4,495 | 682 | 4,600.00 |
| Administration | 29,390 | 40,893 | 35,131 | 33,454 | 7439 | 2,900.00 |
| Public administration building | 7,963 | 14,727 | 11,652 | 11,040 | 3,687 | 4,788.00 |
| Exhibition building | 783 | 1,287 | 1,029 | 923 | 364 | 4,794.00 |
| Research and lab building | 6,082 | 7,738 | 7,085 | 7,280 | 458 | 4,981.00 |
| Public administration building | 73,559 | 97,983 | 89,667 | 85,056 | 12,927 | 2,857.00 |
| School building | 6,675 | 8,491 | 7,638 | 7,525 | 966 | 2,163.00 |
| Public administration building | 56,328 | 61,833 | 59,389 | 60,006 | 1,827 | 2,100.00 |
| Health clinic | 97,615 | 156,583 | 116,093 | 99,390 | 57,193 | 3,627.00 |
| Research and lab building | 13,825 | 19,267 | 16,710 | 16,444 | 2,823 | 4,167.00 |
| Public administration building | 73,552 | 91,855 | 83,461 | 86,376 | 5,479 | 2,615.00 |
| Office and lab building | 6,004 | 7,562 | 6,765 | 7,455 | 107 | 1,437.00 |
| **Sum / Average %** | | | | | | |

| Construction Costs 1. Prize | Saving construction costs compared with GFA max. | Savings in % | Savings in comparison with GFA Ø | Savings in % | Costs of competition | Cost share of ADC of construction costs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| € 53,520,000 | € 17,040,000 | 24.1% | -€ 4,320,000 | -8.8% | 240,000.00 € | 0.45 % |
| € 7,250,000 | € 3,500,000 | 32.6% | € 1,750,000 | 19.4% | 180,000.00 € | 2.48 % |
| € 26,250,000 | € 14,070,000 | 34.9% | € 1,470,000 | 5.3% | 200,000.00 € | 0.76 % |
| € 13,650,000 | € 3,000,000 | 18.0% | € 300,000 | 2.2% | 130,000.00 € | 0.95 % |
| € 62,140,000 | € 12,220,000 | 16.4% | € 780,000 | 1.2% | 220,000.00 € | 0.35 % |
| € 37,400,000 | € 6,600,000 | 15.0% | € 2,600,000 | 6.5% | 180,000.00 € | 0.48 % |
| € 78,840,000 | € 30,510,000 | 27.9% | € 1,890,000 | 2.3% | 340,000.00 € | 0.43 % |
| € 41,440,000 | € 18,760,000 | 31.2% | € 5,320,000 | 11.4% | 280,000.00 € | 0.68 % |
| € 5,842,000 | € 483,000 | 7.6% | -€ 115,000 | -2.0% | 100,000.00 € | 1.71 % |
| € 10,614,000 | € 4,901,000 | 31.6% | € 1,247,000 | 10.5% | 155,000.00 € | 1.46 % |
| € 81,408,200 | € 6,832,200 | 7.7% | € 843,700 | 1.0% | 588,000€ | 0.72 % |
| € 14,563,600 | € 598,000 | 3.9% | -€ 349,600 | -2.5% | 238,000€ | 1.63 % |
| € 13,807,300 | € 941,700 | 6.4% | -€ 563,300 | -4.3% | 235,000€ | 1.70 % |
| € 15,320,400 | € 1,122,000 | 6.8% | -€ 193,800 | -1.3% | 131,000€ | 0.86 % |
| € 110,811,000 | € 12,134,600 | 9.90 % | € 4,446,200 | 3.9% | 658,000€ | 0.59 % |
| € 116,031,200 | € 23,366,200 | 16.8% | € 8,419,400 | 6.8% | 479,000€ | 0.41 % |
| € 141,462,000 | € 9,520,700 | 6.3% | -€ 6,374,200 | -4.7% | 690,000€ | 0.49 % |
| € 12,506,000 | € 562,400 | 4.3% | -€ 710,400 | -6.0% | 180,000€ | 1.44 % |
| € 4,728,800 | € 1,476,600 | 23.8% | € 561,200 | 10.6% | 140,000€ | 2.96 % |
| € 13,519,200 | € 6,609,100 | 32.80 % | € 1,543,700 | 10.2% | 183,000€ | 1.35 % |
| € 62,695,100 | € 8,566,600 | 12.00 % | € 580,000 | 0.9% | 467,000€ | 0.74 % |
| € 66,740,600 | € 0 | 0.00 % | -€ 6,568,500 | -10.9% | 390,000€ | 0.58 % |
| € 7,424,400 | € 2,686,400 | 26.60 % | € 184,000 | 2.4% | 96,000€ | 1.29 % |
| € 6,536,600 | € 1,035,000 | 13.70 % | € 239,200 | 3.5% | 135,000€ | 2.07 % |
| € 22,880,000 | € 4,989,400 | 17.9% | € 1,653,600 | 6.7% | 225,000€ | 0.98 % |
| € 150,075,000 | € 12,252,500 | 7.5% | € 1,519,600 | 1.0% | 383,000€ | 0.26 % |
| € 62,285,600 | € 10,743,200 | 14.70 % | -€ 6,396,000 | -11.4% | 148,000€ | 0.24 % |
| € 50,490,000 | € 34,170,000 | 40.40 % | € 10,368,300 | 17.0% | 188,000€ | 0.37 % |
| € 20,677,000 | € 3,137,200 | 13.2% | -€ 289,800 | -1.4% | 115,000€ | 0.56 % |
| € 97,016,600 | € 21,573,100 | 18.20 % | € 4,863,300 | 4.8% | 506,000€ | 0.52 % |
| € 52,859,520 | € 17,653,356 | 25.0% | € 2,930,256 | 5.3% | 480,000€ | 0.91 % |
| € 4,424,862 | € 1,745,016 | 28.3% | € 508,164 | 10.3% | 195,000€ | 4.41 % |
| € 36,261,680 | € 2,281,298 | 5.9% | -€ 971,295 | -2.8% | 480,000€ | 1.32 % |
| € 243,004,992 | € 36,932,439 | 13.2% | € 13,173,627 | 5.1% | 2,250,000€ | 0.93 % |
| € 16,276,575 | € 2,089,458 | 11.4% | € 244,419 | 1.5% | 410,000€ | 2.52 % |
| € 126,012,600 | € 3,836,700 | 3.0% | -€ 1,295,700 | -1.0% | 870,000€ | 0.69 % |
| € 360,487,530 | € 207,439,011 | 36.5% | € 60,581,781 | 14.4% | 2,900,000€ | 0.80 % |
| € 68,522,148 | € 11,763,441 | 14.7% | € 1,108,422 | 1.6% | 660,000€ | 0.96 % |
| € 225,873,240 | € 14,327,585 | 6.0% | -€ 7,622,725 | -3.5% | 920,000€ | 0.41 % |
| € 10,712,835 | € 153,759 | 1.4% | -€ 991,530 | -10.2% | 280,000€ | 2.61 % |
| **€ 2,552,360,582** | **€ 571,622,963** | **16.7%** | **€ 92,364,019** | **2.4%** | **17,645,000.00** | **1.13 %** |

# CHAPTER 3

## Country-specific Recommendations

Austria
Croatia
Cyprus
Germany
Hungary
Slovenia
Spain
Switzerland
The Netherlands

# Country-specific Recommendations

## **AUSTRIA** | Federal Chamber of Civil Engineers (Austria) | Bundeskammer der Ziviltechniker:innen

Architecture always has a public impact, which is why planning decisions should be orientated towards guidelines for building culture, architectural quality and, last but not least, effective contributions to the protection of our environment. Quality is not a luxury; on the contrary, in the face of multiple societal crises, we are obliged to find and implement effective solutions. Procurement processes that are orientated towards quality-related criteria are also highly economical. Architects contribute disproportionately to the common good through their mostly unpaid contributions to competitions.

These facts are not adequately reflected in the Austrian Federal Procurement Act (*Bundesvergabegesetz*) and the EU procurement directives. In order to counteract the associated undesirable developments and economic deficits, a set of rules was developed for Austria in the form of the WSA 2010* competition standard for architecture, which can be seen as a supplement to public procurement law. It would be desirable and about time to raise this set of rules to the rank of law as a mandatory basis for all competitions and competition-like procedures.

Architecture as an intellectual-creative achievement requires a different status within public procurement law than is currently defined in EU legislation. It should go without saying that the negotiation and commission of a planning contract must be preceded by the development of a high-quality design concept. When it comes to public construction projects, this development and decision-making process must be based on participation, equality, and transparency and be democratically legitimised. With this in mind, preference should be given to architectural design competitions based on a quality-orientated competition system, particularly for public building projects in the upper threshold range.

Another urgent recommendation for improving public procurement law would be to take into account the structure and actual circumstances of architecture in Europe. 68% of architecture firms are one-person companies, a further 13% are two-person companies[26]. We have many excellently trained professionals, including many young and increasingly female architects, whose expertise and status are not sufficiently considered when it comes to awarding public contracts. The vast majority of architects are excluded from public contracts due to unsuitable criteria of eligibility. These criteria need to be adapted to the small-scale structure of the creative scene.

## **CROATIA** | The Croatian Chamber of Architects | Hrvatska komora arhitekata

### Criteria for Mandatory Architectural Design Competitions

Currently, local-level spatial plans are not permitted to mandate architectural design competitions on private land or public land not owned by the local self-government units, despite the significance of certain locations within the public realm. The Spatial Planning Act should introduce clear criteria to expand the scope of mandatory architectural design competitions to include specific private and public sites to enhance the quality of the built environment.

### Adoption of the Ordinance on the Architectural Design Competition of the Croatian Chamber of Architects within the Public Procurement Framework

The Croatian Chamber of Architects and the Croatian Architects' Association are in charge of the Ordinance on Architectural Design Competitions. Recognising this professional regulation as binding within the public procurement system would contribute to the transparency and quality of architectural design competition procedures by ensuring clear criteria and standards are upheld.

### Encouraging Architectural Design Competitions through Funding Mechanisms

Promoting architectural design competitions through financial support is a

[26] The Architects' Council of Europe/Mirza & Nacey Research Ltd, *The Architectural Profession in Europe 2024 Sector Study*, p. 36.

crucial step toward achieving architectural excellence in public investments. Introducing a requirement for conceptual design to be developed through architectural design competitions as a condition for receiving funding or co-financing would ensure that public projects are delivered with the highest level of quality and innovation.

**Systematic Support for Small Local Self-Government Units in Organising Architectural Design Competitions**

Due to limited capacity, small local self-government units typically rely on standard public procurement procedures to avoid the organisational and financial challenges of conducting architectural design competitions. Providing systematic support to local authorities in organising architectural design competitions would promote architectural excellence to improve the quality of the built environment.

## **CYPRUS** | Cyprus Architects Association | Σύλλογος Αρχιτεκτόνων Κύπρου

### Introduction

This section outlines key recommendations for improving the system of Architectural Design Competitions (ADCs) in Cyprus. It is informed by national regulations, the Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber (ETEK), the Cyprus Architects Association (CAA), and the findings of the ARCH-E European research project on quality-based public procurement. The aim is to support public authorities, architects, and stakeholders in developing fair, transparent, and high-quality procurement praxes that enhance architectural value, promote participation, and align with European best practices and the principles of Baukultur and the New European Bauhaus (NEB).

### 1. Adopt Architectural Competitions as Standard Praxis

Architectural design competitions should be the preferred method for procuring public projects, especially those of significant public interest. This approach ensures transparency, fosters innovation, and enhances the quality of the built environment.

### 2. Ensure Inclusive Participation

Eligibility criteria should be clear and non-restrictive, allowing participation from:

- Licensed architects registered with the Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber (ETEK).
- Architects from EU/EEA member states or countries with agreements under the WTO Government Procurement Agreement (GPA).

Avoid additional solvency or experience requirements that may disproportionately exclude young or small practices.

### 3. Promote Open and Two-Stage Competitions

- **Open Competitions:** Encourage broad participation to gather diverse ideas and solutions.
- **Two-Stage Competitions:** For complex projects, implement a two-phase process to manage workload and allow for detailed development of shortlisted proposals.

### 4. Simplify Submission Requirements

Limit the extent of required documentation to what is necessary for evaluation. This reduces the burden on participants and encourages wider involvement, particularly from smaller firms.

### 5. Provide Fair Compensation

Offer appropriate remuneration to participants, especially those advancing to later stages of the competition. This praxis acknowledges the effort invested and promotes equitable participation.

### 6. Ensure Transparent and Qualified Jury Composition

Juries should comprise professionals with relevant expertise and be appointed as follows:

- **Three-Member Jury:** One client representative and at least two architects recommended by ETEK and the Cyprus Architects Association (CAA).

- **Five-Member Jury:** One client representative, one appointed member (architect or related professional), and at least three architects recommended by ETEK and CAA.
- **Seven-Member Jury:** One client representative, two appointed members (at least one architect or related professional), and at least four architects recommended by ETEK and CAA, with at least one possessing specialised knowledge relevant to the competition.

Diversity in terms of gender and generational representation should be considered to enrich the evaluation process.

### 7. Maintain Anonymity and Transparency

Submissions should be evaluated anonymously to ensure impartiality. All competition procedures, regulations, and evaluation criteria must be clearly stated and accessible to all participants. Jury decisions should be documented, and evaluation processes should be transparent and available to all stakeholders.

### 8. Engage Public Participation

Involve communities and users in the early stages of project development to ensure that the resulting architecture meets public needs and gains community support. This approach fosters acceptance and enhances the relevance of the projects.

### 9. Respect Intellectual Property Rights

Participants retain the copyright of their designs. No alterations may be made without the author's formal consent.

### 10. Publish Competition Outcomes

Ensure that the results of competitions, including awarded entries and jury reports, are published and accessible to promote transparency and public trust in the process.

These recommendations aim to strengthen the architectural competition framework in Cyprus, promoting excellence, fairness, and sustainability in the built environment.

## **GERMANY** | Federal Chamber of German Architects | Bundesarchitektenkammer

### Participation in ADCs from Abroad Should Be Seen as an Enrichment for Every ADC

ADCs promote creative, innovative, and sustainable solutions for future-orientated environmental design. They serve as a key tool for engaging the public with architecture and building culture. Equal access and conditions apply to all participants. To ensure inclusivity, requirements should align with the task and necessary qualifications, allowing smaller firms and newcomers to compete. Exaggerated requirements, such as excessive reference projects or turnover, limit access and reduce market diversity.

While preserving local architectural identity is vital in ADCs, other procedural aspects could benefit from EU-wide harmonisation. Key elements include title recognition, accessible entry conditions, intellectual property rights, fair contracts, and prize structures aligned with national economies. Cross-border collaboration between neighbouring EU countries enhances success. Low participation rates signal the need for further attention and investigation to determine what specific measures are needed to improve existing competition systems, facilitate cross-border access, and ensure high-quality procedures.

### Juries with Transnational Experience Make a Valuable Contribution to Well-founded Competition Decisions

The diverse architecture and tendering cultures across EU member states make ADCs less transparent for outsiders. Competitions are often political, with key context and expectations hidden from non-locals. This lack of access to informal knowledge can hinder foreign participants. Prejudices often stem from mutual unfamiliarity with local systems on both sides, the participants' and the organisers' point of view.

The invitation of jury members who are not from the region demonstrates the commitment of the client and the ADC organisers to European openness and is recognised as a transparent praxis that encourages foreign architects to participate in the ADC.

**Cross-national Access to ADC Information (Awards, Results, Rules, and Regulations) also Promotes the National ADC System**

The ADC system in Germany is mainly governed by the Planning Contest Guidelines (RPW 2013). It is the basis for all ADCs organised in the area of federal construction. In addition, the RPW 2013 is binding for state-run ADCs in almost all federal states. Other public and private organisers are recommended to apply the RPW 2013 in the same way.

The rules for ADCs in Germany are based on these fundamental principles:

- The equal treatment of all participants in the ADC, including in the application process;
- A clear and unambiguous brief;
- The appropriate price-performance ratio;
- A competent jury;
- The anonymity of the contest entries;
- The contract promise.

Promoting and facilitating access to cross-border ADCs is first and foremost an opportunity to improve the dissemination of architectural ideas, knowledge, and expertise at European level. Through this exchange, building praxes and architectural cultures can evolve, technological innovations and unexpected results can emerge.

**Suggestions for Future Development of the German ADC System**

- **Sustainability aspects** can be useful for award criteria, but must be balanced with the requirement for less bureaucracy.
- **Access criteria** for ADCs (gender criteria, small offices…) should not be further inflated and must be kept low threshold, not least to prevent the public sector from organising an ADC at all.
- **Low thresholds** should be achieved by focusing requirements primarily on professional competence.
- The possibility of **public participation** should continue to be limited to the stage before the actual ADC (definition of tasks) in order not to affect the principle of anonymity.

- The BAK does not consider the introduction of an explicit '**simplified procedure**' to be appropriate. The standard ADC in accordance with the RPW is already regarded as a simple procedure.

## **HUNGARY** | Chamber of Hungarian Architects | Magyar Építész Kamara

Since its establishment in the 19th century, the Hungarian Chamber of Architects has always been committed to the organisation of architectural design competitions as a form of procedure that supports the creation of the best possible architectural solution.

Act LXIX of 2023 on the Order of State Construction Investments (2023. évi LXIX. törvény az állami építési beruházások rendjéről), enacted last year, specifies that in the case of a significant part of state investments, designers must be selected through Architectural Design Competitions, which is a significant change compared to previous praxis and which will lead to an expected increase in the number of design competitions. The numerical increase in the number of opportunities for commissions and design work has an encouraging effect on the architectural community as a whole. The MÉK actively participates in the preparation of architectural design competitions, in advising announcers, in the preparation of tender model documents, in delegating the chairman, co-chairman, and members of the jury, in the publication of competition announcements, and the results and final reports (MÉK website, weekly digital newsletter, Architects' Gazette).

### 1. Supporting Open ADC Procedures

Efforts shall be made to ensure that the contracting authorities (public and private) launch as many open design competition procedures as possible, in compliance with the relevant regulations. In the case of invitational design competitions, it would also be expedient to allow the participation of design teams other than those invited (mixed procedure), thus increasing the number of entries submitted in the given procedure.

### 2. The Possibility of Internationalising Design Competitions

It would be advisable to internationalise as many competitions as possible, not only design competitions above the EU threshold, as these can bring

new architectural ideas and approaches, and would move architectural firms in the direction of international cooperation. The expected benefits would probably mobilise domestic offices more towards cooperation and may bring a number of new experiences and knowledge to local offices (e.g., international architectural quality, sustainability, reduction of carbon footprint, recycling of building and building materials, management of climate change, etc.).

### 3. Preparation of Design Competitions

The Hungarian design competition praxis and the results of the ARCH-E research show that the more careful the preparation of the application, the more precise the design programme and the formulation of the design task, the better the architectural quality of the submitted design competition works. This is partly the responsibility of the announcer and partly of the evaluation committee, but it would be advisable to set up a professional team of preparatory advisors.

### 4. The Appropriate Professional Composition of the Design Competition Jury

A competent, knowledgeable jury increases the willingness to apply, because it provides certainty to the architects that the design competition will be evaluated in a professional manner and on a professional basis.

### 5. Setting up a Proper Time Schedule

The applicants must be given a sufficient amount of time, even to decide on participation and application, and then to work out the application concept and prepare the plans to be submitted. Too short deadlines discourage architects because they require high-intensity work, which is often more difficult in the case of smaller offices. Fast work does not promote quality work, the appropriate depth of thought, and the proper maturation and processing of plans.

### 6. Technical Plans in Proportion to the Quantity and Content Determined for the Task

The compilation and documentation of the exact evaluation criteria of the design competition in the call (brief) for design competitions. If possible, the requirement for an excessive number of plans should be avoided in the announcement of the design competition, and the focus should be on the decisive elements that are essential for the design sale. In the case of the elaboration of the work parts and layouts to be submitted, the exact

determination of the necessary technical content, the choice of scale, and the method of submission (digital or printed layouts) ensure the anonymity.

**7. Announcement of Design Competitions for Young Architects and Architects at the Beginning of Their Careers**

In the case of certain smaller-scale investments, it would be recommended to announce the design competition only for young architects / architectural firms (ex. max. 35 years old) in order to gain professional experience and recognition, and to expand their list of references, which will also help their professional career.

After winning the design competition, it offers an excellent opportunity for young architects and career-starting offices to get a job.

**8. Informing the Chief Architects about the Design Competition Opportunities**

The College of Chief Architects was established in the Hungarian Chamber of Architects not long ago (2024) as a chamber organisation, and its members play an important role in the development plans of the settlements managed by the municipalities and in the formulation of the architectural requirements of the buildings to be designed in the settlement. They may propose tender procedures for the procurement of architectural or urban planning plans and may participate in the work of the evaluation committees and in the conduct of the tender procedure.

## **SLOVENIA** | Chamber of Architecture and Spatial Planning of Slovenia | Zbornica za arhitekturo in prostor Slovenije

**Architectural Policy**

Despite the exemplary ADC practice in Slovenia, under the slogan of simplifying procedures and encouraging investments, political tendencies to abolish ADCs are cyclically appearing. ADCs would need social consensus and a firmer foundation in re-activation of the Architectural Policy so that they are not so exposed to daily political influences. Slovenia has adopted the Architectural Policy of Slovenia entitled ‘Architecture for People’, but an

action plan and the implementation of concrete measures have still not been achieved.

**Urban Planning and Planning ADCs**

There are very few urban planning ADCs in Slovenia that go beyond one client and one investment task. Project ADCs by public clients, which are carried out on the basis of mandatory criteria (thresholds) in the Public Procurement Act, prevail. In reality, urban planning and design in Slovenia are in decline, and spatial placement is carried out on the basis of normatively oriented spatial acts. The built environment is turning into a shapeless landscape of scattered and uncoordinated interventions and constructions.

We need public and political awareness and a firm decision to reactivate urbanism as a profession and part of the planning process, within which urban planning ADCs should take their proper place.

**Public Procurement**

The thresholds amounts stated in the public procurement of investment values for buildings and landscape arrangements above which an ADC is an obligatory act need to be raised. The amounts have been unchanged for ten years and are disproportionately low, leading contracting authorities to avoid ADCs, even though they are compulsory.

Competitions are currently mandatory for buildings in public use. The obligation should be extended to residential buildings built by public investors as well.

**ADCs Based on Municipal Spatial Acts**

Municipal spatial acts sometimes prescribe an ADC for a specific location or area, without defining the purpose of the competition, whether it is simply to collect different ideas as a basis for further decisions or to produce a master plan or project documentation for a building.

Therefore, all provisions in spatial acts relating to an ADC should be carefully considered and defined, and it may be useful for local municipalities to prepare some recommendations and proposals for spatial acts.

### International Participation in Competitions

International participation in competitions generally raises the quality of planned buildings and built public space and promotes the transfer of knowledge, professional standards, and good practice. Therefore, efforts to internationalise competitions, such as foreign members of the jury, quality tender documents, and promotion of ADCs, should be continued.

## **SPAIN** | Polytechnic University of Valencia | Universitat Politècnica de València

### A PROPOSAL FROM SPAIN according to the Decalogue of Good Practices for Public Procurement in the Field of Architecture (National and International ADCs) by CSCAE and ARCH-E Research

In November 2024, the CSCAE (Council of Chambers of Architects in Spain) approved a Decalogue of Good Practices for Public Procurement in the Field of Architecture that promotes architectural design competitions as the best option to provide both fair public procurement and architectural quality. The works addressed to deliver this Decalogue was headed by the dean of Galicia Architect's Chamber, Luciano González Alfaya, and his team.

Mixing this Decalogue with ARCH-E's research outcomes, it is possible to propose these recommendations:

#### 1. Promote Project Competitions as Standard Procedure

Encourage public authorities to adopt project competitions with a design proposal and competent jury as the primary procurement method. This model maximises quality, transparency, participation, and competition, directly supporting the goals of the ARCH-E project which, through its research, confirms that design competitions are widely recognised by architects as a path to architectural quality.

#### 2. Optimise Public Investment through Architectural Design Competitions

Advocate that architecture be recognised as a public-interest service that contributes to long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability,

in line with Spain's Law 9/2022 on Architectural Quality. This perspective also aligns with ARCH-E's emphasis on Baukultur and NEB goals.

### 3. Establish Fair and Market-Aligned Fees

Ensure service pricing aligns with market standards to maintain quality and viability and prevent praxes that undermine professional sustainability (reference: Law 9/2017 on Public Sector Contracts). Fair and timely payment can help lower economic barriers to participation in architectural design competitions.

### 4. Mandate Two-Phase Competitions for Complex Projects

For contracts with architect fees exceeding € 60,000 or those of significant complexity, establish a two-phase selection process. The first phase should involve a brief concept presentation (e.g., two A3 sheets or equivalent) ensuring the entry threshold is accessible to a wide range of practitioners, followed by a second phase for shortlisted candidates to develop their proposals further. This approach is especially important considering the European context, where nearly two-thirds of practises are solo or two-person offices. For these firms, the first-phase simplicity reduces time and resource burdens while encouraging participation.

### 5. Provide Fair Compensation for Second-Phase Participants

Guarantee that all finalists receive at least 3% of the contract value as compensation, incentivising participation and professional equity. This addresses a critical issue raised by many respondents in the ARCH-E survey: the high cost of preparing detailed competition proposals, which often goes unrewarded and disproportionately excludes small offices from competing on equal terms.

### 6. Simplify Access by Limiting Entry Barriers

Avoid additional solvency criteria beyond a valid architectural degree to foster inclusivity and access for younger or smaller practises. The exclusionary nature of additional financial or organisational requirements was noted by many survey participants, particularly those from small or emerging practices. This barrier is amplified for women-led firms, which tend to report lower turnover, despite equivalent professional versatility.

### 7. Streamline Submission Requirements

The project submission must be limited to the documentation required for preliminary studies, as defined by Spanish RD 2512/1977, and contained within a maximum of two A2 panels. This not only ensures equity but helps avoid unnecessary complexity, particularly in transnational ADCs, where varying standards across countries can hinder comprehension and compliance.

### 8. Set Realistic Deadlines and Formats

Tailor deadlines and formats to the project's scale and complexity, ensuring fairness and depth in responses. The survey highlights that many practitioners, especially those in small firms, struggle with short or unrealistic timelines that disproportionately favour well-resourced competitors. Adjusting schedules to reflect project scale supports higher quality proposals and greater participation.

### 9. Ensure Diverse and Qualified Juries

Require gender-balanced juries (60/40) and at least two-thirds architects, reinforcing credibility, professionalism, and equity. The ARCH-E report identifies a perceived lack of fairness and transparency in competition processes, which could be mitigated by structured jury composition policies. Representation—both in terms of profession and gender—is essential to ensure legitimacy and public trust.

### 10. Guarantee Transparent Outcomes

Commit to publishing all awarded entries and, where feasible, host public presentations to build public trust and awareness. ARCH-E data reveals that only 35% of architects who won international ADCs actually received a commission. By making competition results public and accessible, and by clarifying the post-competition process, institutions can restore confidence and demonstrate commitment to fairness.

# **SWITZERLAND** | Swiss Society of Engineers and Architects | Schweizerischer Ingenieur- und Architektenverein

This document summarises recommendations for the further development of the competition system in Switzerland. It is based on the established SIA regulations 142 and 143 and is intended for clients, planners, juries, and political decision-makers. The recommendations were developed within Arch-E, a European cooperation project that promotes quality-based procurement. Arch-E supports the exchange of best practices and contributes to the comparability of competition standards across Europe.

## International Dimension

International participants broaden the design perspective and bring valuable new insights to competition processes—especially in big, complex planning tasks. Their contributions foster international comparability and enrich architectural diversity. Likewise, jury members with international experience enhance the quality of evaluation by incorporating diverse professional and cultural viewpoints into the decision-making process.

## Selection of Competition Procedure

Open competitions are a key part of Swiss building culture and should be used where appropriate. Experience shows that the more open procedures are applied, the more balanced the level of participation. The competition system must also better reflect the shift toward refurbishment, preservation, and sufficiency through simple, clearly structured procedures instead of increasing complexity. Study commissions under SIA 143 are appropriate for complex tasks where an anonymous procedure would not be effective and a dialogue between participants and client is necessary to resolve it. Regulation 143 provides a proven, fair model with exemplary character at the European level.

## Implementation

Rising demands and increasing team sizes in competitions pose a significant burden on planning offices. The workload for competition submissions in Switzerland should be reduced. Submissions should present solution proposals, not fully developed projects. Only elements strictly necessary

for evaluation should be required. Clients must be aware that the awarded proposal will be further developed and adjusted. Winning teams must also be willing to evolve their project after the competition.

**Participants and Stakeholders**

Interdisciplinary teams should only be required in planning tasks where they contribute to finding solutions and ensure comparability in terms of ecological and technical performance. The composition of juries should be reviewed regularly. New perspectives—especially younger generations and women—as well as the interdisciplinary nature of planning tasks must be represented.

**Conclusion and Outlook**

Switzerland's competition culture is strong, but needs targeted evolution: less formal burden, more diverse juries, and the precise use of suitable procedures. At the core lie SIA regulations 142 and 143—they ensure quality, fairness, and transparency. Competition procedures are not only an instrument for finding solutions in the field of architecture but have proven to be an effective means of obtaining high-quality solutions for other tasks in the built environment as well. To promote strong design and effective solutions to complex challenges, we need clear rules, realistic expectations—and the courage to evolve. The SIA calls on all stakeholders to take responsibility and shape a future-proof competition culture.

## **THE NETHERLANDS** | Eindhoven University of Technology | Technische Universiteit Eindhoven

Our main recommendations are set out in the **ARCH-E Map on ADCs**; in addition we propose the following recommendations for the White Paper:

1. Elaboration of **ADC-specific guidelines** and regulations that focus on architectural quality and distinguish the role of the ADC as a pre-phase of procurement from other procurement methods (regular tenders). Detailed guidelines on the correct organisation and implementation of an ADC guarantee not only the quality but also and especially

the transparency of the competition, specifying rules of selection, appropriate fee scales, and what happens after the competition. While many countries have some sort of guidelines (even the Dutch KOMPAS or the guidelines drafted by BNA), it is necessary to render the application of such guidelines consistent in specific cases (i.e., for public commissions) or even compulsory. This is possible if they are linked to the regular procurement legislation (an example is Slovenia in this case; in countries such as Slovenia and Croatia the organisation of an ADC may even be mandatory according to specific site conditions prescribed by a municipal spatial act. This prevents the unclear selection of other procurement methods for the assignment of architectural commissions).

2. Definition of **appropriate remuneration** (fee scales) of architectural services. This is also somehow related to the elaboration of guidelines and regulations that make clear what kind of service is provided and what are appropriate fees for it.

3. The implementation of **multi-phase ADCs**, in which the first entry submission is open to all professionals, and, at a second stage, stricter requirements may apply. On this topic, however, there are conflicting opinions related to the costs and duration of such an ADC process. The idea at the base of multi-phase ADCs is to allow as many professionals as possible (regardless of experience, provenance, size of the office, etc...) to submit a conceptual vision and be selected based on their idea. Only at a later stage a more detailed level of elaboration can be requested, along with the provision of appropriate remuneration. This approach is similar to the Spanish IMPSOL system, which is also included in our booklet.

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# Colophon

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**Introduction** | ARCH-E & the Project Consortium | Daniel Fügenschuh, ACE Executive Board member and President of BKZT, ARCH-E Leadpartner

The Findings of ARCH-E as a Basis for the Recommendations | The Goals of the ARCH-E Consortium | **Chapter 1** | List of Recommendations | Context & Hard Facts on the Recommendations | Project Coordinators Sebastian Jobst & Anna Resch, BKZT, edited on behalf of the ARCH-E Consortium

**Chapter 2** | Data on the Economic Efficiency of Architectural Design Competitions, Dr. Nikolaus Hellmayr, BKZT

**Chapter 3** | Country-specific Recommendations and expertise contributed by the consortium members of ARCH-E

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