



Architectural Design Competitions

A Key Policy Tool Combining Qualitative & Economic Advantages

ACE and UIA Joint Declaration on the occasion of the ACE X ARCH-E Conference on Architectural Design Competitions organised on 23 April 2026 in Brussels

Architectural design competitions (ADCs) are a proven tool for achieving quality in the built environment. They are based on clear procedures, independent professional evaluation and equal treatment of participants, with the objective of identifying the best proposal for a given task.

The Architects Council of Europe (ACE) and the International Union of Architects (UIA) reaffirm their commitment to these principles and to their consistent application, urging public authorities and private clients to pursue quality, innovation and design excellence through architectural design competitions.

Further to the benefits ADCs offer to clients, competitors, and society, as listed in the joint **Declaration Architectural Design Competitions: A Key Policy Tool to Ensure Quality in the Built Environment** presented in the framework of the Conference on International Design Competitions organised by the UIA and ACE on 25 October 2019 at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, the ARCH-E project has revealed additional advantages.

Economic and societal advantages

Recent data and studies¹ clearly show that architectural solutions, developed within the framework of competitions are economically more advantageous and completed within shorter timeframe than projects realised through other forms of procurement. To fully utilise the potential of ADCs, precise process preparation and clear procedural standards are required.

Higher acceptance of projects

Mechanisms that assess the feasibility of the project, as well as the quality of the ADC brief and procedure ensure transparent and efficient procurement at all stages of the process. In addition, guided participatory processes enable collaborative forms of knowledge transfer between different stakeholder groups improving the competition brief by aligning interests of users including the public. A higher acceptance of projects resulting of transparent procedures involving citizens through participatory processes is a valued benefit for all stakeholders.

¹ An analysis of all entries to 40 ADCs that was conducted in the framework of ARCH-E: Chapter 2 of the ARCH-E White Paper |

Adequacy and suitability for large- and- small- scale projects

In addition to large and exceptional projects, ADCs are also suitable for small-scale projects, provided that the required commitment is reasonable for both organisers and participants. Small projects have a significant impact on the built environment that is encountered daily, representing a substantial portion of municipal budgets.

Competitions as innovation drivers

ACE and the UIA highlight the cultural dimension of ADC's and the importance of providing conditions that allow them to fulfill their role as drivers of innovation.

Accessibility | ADCs must be accessible to all architects, regardless of prior experience or economic capacity. This enables innovation and facilitates market access for emerging talent, while maintaining competitiveness in a global context.

Affordability | The balance between the programme and the scope of work is a key factor in ensuring that ADCs can serve as a laboratory for identifying the best solutions to the complex challenges of our time. Competitions must remain reasonable for participants in terms of time and cost. The profession makes a significant collective effort for the client's benefit by preparing, often at its own expense, multiple solutions for evaluation..

Flexibility | The brief and the task description should allow competitors sufficient freedom of interpretation and should not dictate the solution. The winning project will be further developed after the competition.

ACE and the UIA jointly recommend the conduct of fair competitions and the promotion of competition culture.