

Allan Gintel, Petr Parlář Prize: Less is more



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The 6th year of Petr Parlář Prize is completed. The statistics show that the number of participating towns has decreased (from 27 to 18), also the other side expressed an obviously lower interest. Compared to 2007, there was 3 times less competition designs, in the same proportion also the number of competing designers dropped. Especially today, such numbers can be interpreted as a problem. What has happened?

Certainly, I would not interpret the numbers you mentioned negatively. But things have changed and it is reflected in the last year of the competition. The first five years were for towns, it means for the contracting authorities, free of charge, only a negligible registration fee was paid. This fact often influenced the quality of terms of reference which was in some cases produced very unprofessionally, but also treatment of the received studies. Our interest is that towns not only order the studies but the studies to be also implemented. Therefore, we started for example to require also confirmation about the anticipated date of construction commencement and implemented public presentations of the terms of reference in front of a panel. The new strategy included also gradual increase of the fee from the original 1800 up to 18 000 crowns. And starting the 6th year, the studies are for a fee. If a town does not get any study the whole fee is returned.

Payments for designs, however, a slight bit reduce the original intention of CPP, i.e. the help to towns in solution of their town-planning problems?

Help certainly does not mean to give something free of charge. Today, towns pay for studies according to their sophistication 40 - 50 000 crowns. If they wanted to arrange a similar study by themselves it would cost around 140 000 crowns and if they organized a tender it would be for sure some half million. Therefore, CPP continues to be very advantageous for the participating towns. Therefore I think that what is behind the lower interest of towns are not the mentioned fees. The problem probably is that the contracting authorities must now spend much more effort in relation with the competition, more energy. Our assessment board visits every participating town, the terms of reference are detailed gradually; the mayors must then present them to the public. The whole process is more demanding than it used to be and this certainly influences consideration whether to participate in the competition or not. And regarding your rather covered, but still an objection. During the whole existence of CPP, municipalities received together 130 studies in the value around 17 million CZK. And until last year, the towns got the studies for really a symbolic fee.

What is your explanation of the lower interest of architects?

Here, I could only speculate, and I do not want that. The only sure fact is that the number of competition works decreased also due to the fact that we excluded from the competition, in the 6th year for the first time, students of architectural or construction colleges. On one hand they have their own competitions, on the other hand it caused some problems in practice. Also a good design was influenced by lack of confidence from the contracting authority because it simply feared to devote a project important for the municipality to young and from its point of view inexperienced people.

What is therefore the structure of CPP participants today?

Regarding the contracting authorities, towns with medium size prevail. In two cases we allowed participation of larger towns as an exception, nevertheless in the nearest future we do not want to expand their participation in the competition. Our target group includes towns. 284 of them have been invited to the competition, but there are around six hundred of them registered. The other side - i.e. competing architects and town planners - is more and more represented by experienced and prestigious designers. Thanks to that, the designs have higher quality, also according to the opinion of the panel, lead in the 6th year by architect Masák. This interest reflects not only interesting topic and today already quality terms of reference but also an increasing status and wide coverage of the competition. A CPP winner can, according to our experience, expect almost automatically a larger quantity of orders. We have, in fact, good marketing, envied by many.

Has also the focus of the competition changed? Is it expressed somehow?

Since 2005, the competition topic has really extended a bit. In the official formulation, CPP now includes "revitalizing of public spaces and buildings and interiors under public administration". But also without that it is obvious that the spectrum of terms of reference is, compared to the past, more diversified. For example this year, CPP winner was a study focused on rehabilitation of a cemetery under conservation protection in Sudeten - which is a public space well known to all of us but neglected until recently. More and more also such designs get to the competition like adjustment of various types of buildings under public administration, particularly city halls and libraries.



Every competition should lead to implementation of the winning design in practice. What are the results of CPP in this field?

I must admit that we do not have accurate and complete information. We know about seven implementations but certainly there are some others. We are sending a questionnaire to municipalities which participated in the first four years through which we want to map what are the results of CPP in this field.

What is the interest of the state institutions, resp. our political representation?

The Petr Parlář Prize has been organized already for two years under the auspices of the Ministry of Local Development which also supports it financially, although only to a low extent. At the last festive ceremony, the Petr Parlář Prize was granted by the then Minister Jiří Čunek. CPP enjoys a significant support also from the Capital Prague. The Mayor Bém provides us, in addition to his patronage, also his representation premises for the final ceremony, he also participated at it personally several times. This is valuable - Prague as the capital does not benefit from the competition in any manner; in the past, perhaps only twice its municipal districts were among the participants. We would, however, imagine the state support a bit higher, in particular in the financial area.

What is the budget of CPP?

Somewhat around two million crowns. The competition itself is a goodly source of income and more than one half of the funds we get through provision of various services to towns and municipalities - organizations of ordered town-planning and architectural competitions, organizing of professional seminars and conferences and participation of our experts in tenders. At the same time, we want to expand those activities. For example in spring, we will open the first year of the school of architecture for the staff of municipal administration. We participate also in publishing of the book of interviews with significant architects which will be published this year under the title City among Buildings (Město mezi domy). Its introduction will be part of the festive ceremony of granting the Petr Parlář Prize for 2009. We could, however, do much more, but we have a weak background compared to other similar institutions. Which is first of all the matter of the money.

CPP was, however, originally organized as an initiative of the private sector, isn't it therefore a problem to be resolved by sponsors?

Dependence on sponsors can be even deadly. At least because sponsoring usually has in fact personal background - then a change in the director is enough to cut it. But we cannot complain in this regard. At the beginning, the project was financially supported by British American Tobacco, later Hochtief and Stavby silnic a železnic were its partners. In particular Hochtief is very active, cooperation is just exemplary and in particular long term. We are of course searching other partners, but as I have already mentioned, we do not want to be dependant. Nevertheless, we want to create cooperation of institutions which are not careless as to what is the appearance of our towns, together with them to contribute in various manners to architecture becoming really the matter of public interest.

Should not appearance of our towns be of interest of the towns themselves, resp. their administration?

It is true, but I am sorry to state that generally, relationship to architecture and specifically to restoration of the former charm of Czech towns, which is the purpose of CPP, is still far from the ideal. Municipal policy is today much about various material interests of its actors. Therefore, participation in CPP is often, more or less, individual initiative of one or two members of the administration which is not, as a whole, interested in the matter.

Competition for Petr Parlář Prize 2008

Petr Parlář Prize: Rehabilitation of the cemetery in Vítkov/ Ing. arch. Martin Rosa, Ing. arch. Jan Kratochvíl
Hochtief CZ Prize: New centre of municipality Svatobořice-Mistřín/ akad. arch. Michal Šrámek,
Jan Proksa and Lucie Vencelidesová
SSŽ Prize: Revitalization and completion of the former monastery Ursulines in the town Jeseník/ Ing. arch. Zbyněk Ryška, Ing. arch. Petr Baletka

Jury

Prof. Ing. arch. Miroslav Masák - the Chairman

Ing. arch. Pavel Hnilička

Ing. arch. Ivan Hnízdil

Ing. arch. Tomáš Hradečný

Ing. arch. MgA. Alena Hýblová

Ing. arch. Milan Korner

akad. arch. Petr Kovář

Ing. arch. Jan Sedlák

Ing. arch. Jaroslav Wertig

(Applications of towns into the 7th year of CPP are accepted by March 2 this year. More information on website www.cenapp.cz).

Photo archives of CPP

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