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ARCH-E project: A view into the European competition landscape

Introduction

(ARCH-E, 2025)

ARCH-E is a project on architectural design competitions (ADCs) co-funded by the European Union under the Creative Europe framework (CREA). It started in February 2023 and will last for three years. ARCH-e is composed of ten European partner organizations – the Austrian Federal Chamber of Civil Engineers (BKZT), the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE), the Croatian Chamber of Architects (CCA), the Chamber of Architecture and Spatial Planning of Slovenia (ZAPS), the Association of Architects of Cyprus (CAA), the Federal Chamber of German Architects (BAK), Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e), the Polytechnic University of Valencia (UPV), Sepa Engineering GmbH (SEPA), and the Chamber of Hungarian Architects (MÉK) – with the Chamber of Architecture and Spatial Planning among them, and five cooperation partners: the Czech Chamber of Architects (ČKA), the French National Chamber of Architects (CNOA), the Chamber of Architects of the Province of Bozen, the Swiss Society of Engineers and Architects (SIA), and the International Union of Architects (UIA). ARCH-E recognizes the crucial role of ADCs in the creation of a safe, fair, sustainable, inclusive, and beautiful built environment. Its main objective is to promote high-quality architectural solutions for the built environment by



Figure 1: Meeting of the ARCH-E consortium at ZAPS in Ljubljana in 2023 (photo: ZAPS).

increasing the use of ADCs in Europe. To achieve this, it has developed several strategies. ARCH-e intends to enhance cross-border collaboration among various architecture professionals through the use of the ARCH-E platform and network, services, and digital solutions. It aims to raise awareness and facilitate learning processes among stakeholders, architects, policymakers, and ADC procurers, leading to new ways of thinking about architectural challenges and promoting long-term innovation strategies. ARCH-E seeks to create a transnational competition culture through the circulation and exchange of ideas.

Because ADC procedures are determined by national frameworks and traditions and due to a lack of information exchange, there is very low transnational participation. This information lack excludes many architects from participating in the (cross-border) market and thus hinders competition. Small or micro-enterprises – with an above-average proportion of female and/or young architects – are particularly affected, which has a detrimental effect on their professional career. Promoting ADCs will lead to better implementation of the Davos Declaration for Baukultur and of the New European Bauhaus in European planning and building pro-

jects on a daily basis, and it will help to meet the climate challenge and improve the quality of the built environment.

The newly developed ARCH-E online platform (<https://arch-e.eu>) provides a wide range information on ADC systems (with a special focus on consideration of Baukultur und New Bauhaus standards), and it facilitates transnational participation. Its core element is a network of over five hundred architects from more than twenty countries, from which transnational working groups can be quickly recruited for participation in ADCs. This is especially important for women and young professionals, who usually have fewer transnational business contacts. The ARCH-E consortium reaches over 560,000 architects across Europe that benefit from the project results.

The main outputs of the project are the ARCH-E ADC Map, a comparative description of national ADC systems, the multilingual ARCH-E Glossary with technical terms, and the ARCH-E Architects' Needs Report. In addition, the ARCH-E webpage provides a SWOT analysis tool, and one of the final ARCH-E outputs will be the ARCH-E White Paper, in which we will inform policymakers about the project results and provide recommendations on how the internationalization of careers, equal treatment, and green deal goals can best be achieved in architecture.

ARCH-E ADC Map

(Bekkering et al., 2025)

The ARCH-E ADC Map provides directions to architects and other experts in architecture on where to find procurement platforms, information on national regulations, chambers representing architects, and other helpful resources helping people orient themselves in the international ADC landscape. ARCH-E is an ongoing project involving partners and related projects

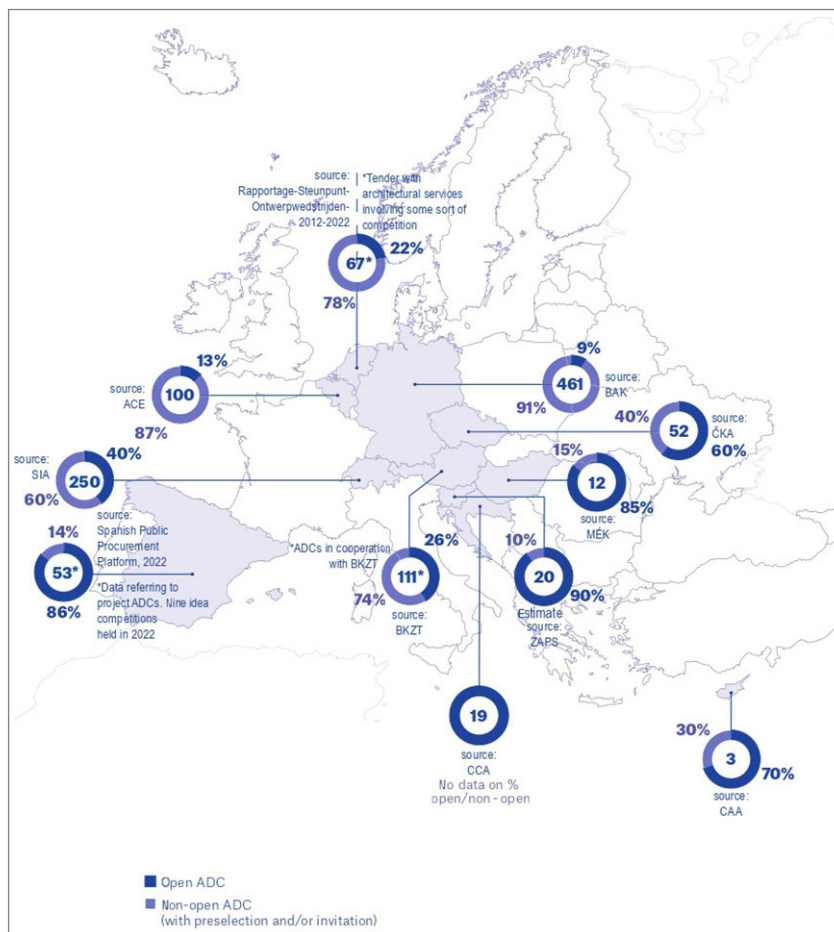


Figure 2: Map of the average number and types of ADCs per year in selected EU countries. (image: ARCH-E).

all over Europe. Therefore, the ARCH-E ADC Map is growing and is gradually incorporating more information. The ARCH-E ADC Map is now already available in pdf and print form in English (<https://www.arch-e.eu/maps-on-adcs>) and in the national languages of the partners (the Slovenian version is available at https://www.arch-e.eu/files/maps-on-adcs/ARCH-E_MapOnADCs_SL_web_v1.pdf). It contains four chapters: Mapping the European Landscape of ADCs, Five Parameters for a European Debate on ADCs, Good Practices in European ADCs, and Conclusion.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the European context of ADCs. It has two main parts: 1) the graphic visualization of national data on ADCs and the architecture profession in comparative maps

and 2) eleven country profiles with a textual and infographic description of their national competition systems. Chapter 2 focuses on the European dimension of ADCs. Structured on the basis of the five parameters (regulations, accessibility, quality, transparency, and stakeholders' benefits), the second chapter brings to the fore challenges and opportunities for an EU market of architectural services. Through the experiences and voices of interview participants, this chapter seeks to stimulate reflection and discussion, emphasizing the subjective quality of ADC participation, implementation, and results. Chapter 3 is a collection of selected national cases that represent successful practice in the organization and implementation of ADCs. It is important to stress that the qualification as a "successful practice" always refers to specific contextual conditions and

should be understood in relative terms. For this reason, the examples in this chapter are proposed as “good” practices instead of “best” practices in absolute terms. The focus of the examples presented in Chapter 3 is on how the selected competition procedure addresses a given challenge and positively relates to one or more of the five parameters (regulations, accessibility, quality, transparency, and benefits for stakeholders). The quality of the selected cases is not on the architectural outcome, but rather on the competition process itself. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the lessons learned from the first year of the ARCH-E experience and research activities, providing suggestions for the future implementation and expansion of the study on ADCs.

The ARCH-E ADC Map shows that, at the national level, country-specific frameworks and traditions contribute to the uniqueness of local ADC systems. These reflect the richness and variety of architectural cultures and heritages across Europe. In a committed effort at knowledge dissemination, it is important to translate these differences into learning opportunities. Moreover, a long-term strategy for collecting and sharing ADC data across Europe is missing. Through its research initiatives, the ARCH-E project addresses the problems related to knowledge and information exchange that are faced by European architects, their chambers, and professional associations.

ARCH-E Glossary
(ARCH-E, 2025)

The ARCH-E Glossary brings together eleven country-specific perspectives on architectural competition procedures in Europe. A total of 190 terms explain the regional characteristics of competition culture. Because the language variations are not mere translations, but original descriptions of the local practice in the subject areas, the terms

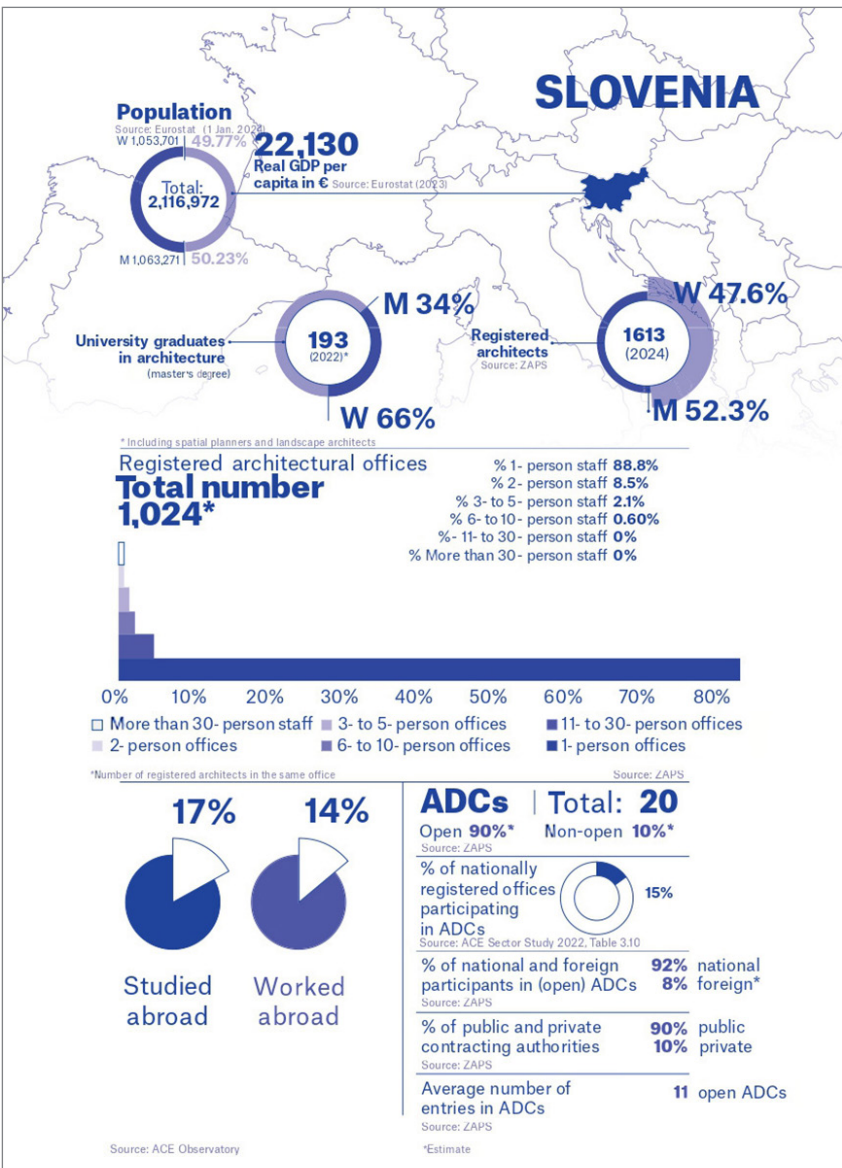


Figure 3: ADCs in Slovenia in numbers (image: ARCH-E).

can be compared with each other and examined for similarities and differences. This compendium currently contains around a thousand definitions. A comment function invites users to suggest changes to the definitions and practical reports on the topics, thus allowing the ARCH-E Glossary to grow continuously. ARCH-E is a multifaceted project that will be carried out until 2026. As the project (including its studies, collaboration between the partners involved, and transfer of know-how to other cooperation partners and projects) evolves, the online tools are also contin-

ually being refined. For this reason, the ARCH-E Glossary is work in progress.

ARCH-E Architects’ Needs Report
(Alvarez Isidro et al., 2025)

The ARCH-E Architects’ Needs Report focuses on providing a structured analysis of architects’ engagement with transnational ADCs and identifying challenges, motivations, and potential areas for improvement within the existing framework. To achieve the goal, an extensive multilingual survey was

conducted among architects and other ADC stakeholders. The survey reached 1,290 respondents in more than twenty countries. The main lines of inquiry addressed in the survey were architects' interest in transnational ADCs; the knowledge, skill gaps, and barriers they face; their level of international networking; and how the ARCH-E project can support their professional growth and development. The primary objective of the survey was to highlight the challenges architects encounter when participating in ADCs in other countries. The findings will serve as a foundation for developing targeted recommendations for chambers and associations of architects, helping them provide better support for cross-border participation. They will contribute to a broader understanding of ADCs across Europe, highlighting key trends, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

The results show that regulatory challenges such as complex bureaucratic requirements and country-specific regulations hinder international ADC participation. Ten per cent of respondents cited a lack of familiarity with foreign legal frameworks, and 6.6% reported being unable to meet financial turnover requirements. Regarding accessibility, only 25% of respondents participated in international ADCs, compared to 69% in national competitions. Financial constraints (12.5%), language barriers (11.3%), and perceived low success rates (9.8%) were major deterrents. Although it is not considered an issue to worry about by respondents, the reality is that only 18% of female architects participated in international ADCs, compared to 27% of men. Men were also twice as likely to receive direct invitations to ADCs (22% vs. 11%). The economic benefits of ADCs were limited. Seventy-one per cent of firms reported earning no revenue from international ADCs, and only 2% of firms generated more than 60% of their income from

such competitions. Many architects felt that ADC selection processes favoured well-established firms. National chambers of architects played a key role in providing ADC information, but the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE) was perceived as less impactful. Private-led ADCs were seen as more flexible and innovative, but these raised concerns about transparency and reliability. Public ADCs, although structured, were often bureaucratically rigid. Winning an ADC did not always guarantee a contract for preparing project documentation. Only 35% of female winners (of the 18% that took part in international ADCs) and 34% of male winners (of the 17% that took part in international ADCs) secured a commission, highlighting the need for reforms. Although 40% (of around 35% of participants in international ADCs) cooperated with local bureaus in the preparation phase of the competition solution, only 31% did so during construction, indicating challenges in sustaining partnerships. No need for further education was seen by 31.1% of respondents, whereas 30% considered training "helpful indeed", and 10.2% saw it as "an absolute must". Language skills and legal knowledge were among the most significant gaps. Swiss and Austrian competitions were praised for their transparency and efficiency.

Conclusion

(Bekkering et al., 2025)

The research activity undertaken with the ARCH-E project on ADCs should be seen as an ongoing endeavour rather than a completed task. Currently, the project encompasses the countries associated with ARCH-E partners and cooperation partners. However, to create a more comprehensive picture of European design competitions, it is essential to expand the research to include a broader range of countries and their ADC systems. This expansion would not only provide a more

complete picture but also reveal new opportunities for cross-border collaboration and participation. Moreover, expanding the types of data collected and involving a wider range of stakeholders in data provision are crucial areas for further research. The current state of the project offers a preliminary overview of European ADCs, emphasizing the opportunities and challenges within the EU market. However, future research should focus on the roles of various actors from a practical perspective, with an eye toward implementing concrete interventions through pilot projects and collaborative activities. In this regard, the ARCH-E platform and its digital tools (the ARCH-E Glossary, the online ARCH-E ADC Map, and the network) serve as valuable resources to facilitate research expansion.

In conclusion, the initiatives and research outcomes of ARCH-E underscore the benefits of a cross-border collaborative approach in addressing the complexities of ADCs in Europe. The involvement of diverse stakeholders and experts within the architectural profession (including representatives from chambers, policy experts, designers, managers, clients, and academics) highlights that a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of ADCs requires sustained cooperation, exchange, and dialogue. Therefore, it is crucial to broaden the network of interested parties and promote experimental methods of collaboration to challenge traditional competition models and foster innovation. By recognizing the pivotal role of competitions in achieving architectural excellence, the ARCH-E project opens up the arena for a committed discussion on design competitions and invites new participants into the ongoing conversation about the proactive improvement of Europe's living environment.

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