

What new ways for EUROPAN?

Ideas from the point of view of a manager

I have been being in the situation for five years now that I can supervise the management of the EUROPAN competitions in Hungary, about which I hardly knew anything previously.

During these five years the Hungarian background of the competition – as part of the international framework, rather getting closer to the mainstream of the various international practical solutions - has been substantially transformed, since after the loss of our central government funding we could only keep the competition alive with introducing the principle „the beneficiary partner pays”, with finding these „beneficiary” local governments through open tenders.

This situation has been addressing the question from the very first point „why and when” is that specific city „beneficiary”? Why is it his interest to spend a significant amount of public money on the participation in EUROPAN? What are the comparative benefits, which make EUROPAN beneficial for site owners, what are the drawbacks and how can EUROPAN be more competitive with other means of reaching similar results?

The most important benefits

Innovative solutions: The most important benefit of EUROPAN is that it can provide such solutions in a great number that are independent and are in specific details fresh, innovative and original. They usually can divert from the conventional solutions and because of that can shift stuck and problematic cases from their previous position, while giving new impulses to it.

International Brand with perfect communication possibilities. The competition is specially beneficial from the point of view of communication: the international character, the European dimension can create a beneficial appreciation for the area and for its owner as well, at the same time increasing the importance and the value of the area.

Favorable costs: The EUROPAN is still a relatively cheap solution for its purpose in Hungary. A normal ideas competition carried out according to the national law on architectural competitions is approximately 20-50% more expensive for a local government than participating in EUROPAN.

Youthfulness: Young professionals around the age 40 are already considered experienced, nevertheless the word “young” used in the communication of the competition calls for sympathy in numerous potential site owner.

Loophole in the unfavorable legal context: in Hungary the architectural competitions – because of their over-emphasized architecture orientations – mean a lot of bad constraints for the site owners (politicians, developers), so they try to avoid them. Since EUROPAN does not belong to the Hungarian competition system, not all the regulations apply to them, which means a positive judgment.

Typical drawbacks

EUROPAN is slow. The developer of a privately owned area has no 2,5 years to wait for the ideas, for the best possible solution of the development of his area. He rather pays more to experts and designers, but wants to see results in a few months’ time. Or if he puts the site to reserves for later development will not want to pay even so much and suspends the spendings for later times.

The result of EUROPAN is vague. The jury process of the competition entries is far from the area and from its owners, which on the one hand provides a quality assurance in contrary to “local” solutions, but on the other hand makes the outcome of the project unstable. It can happen that the awarded project contradicts or very much differs from the interest of the site owner, so the competition can be considered a waste of money.

The result of EUROPAN is too sterile. The secrecy of the competition even with the long duration of the process provides only very much limited interactions between the site owners and the competitors, so the results at the end are relatively far from notion imagined at the time of preparing the brief, which causes disappointment for the developer.

Professionally oriented communication: The communication of EUROPAN is using the traditional professional architectural language, which is losing its efficiency as soon as the prestige of the “expert” is not so highly appreciated.

Conclusions, recommendations

Based on the previous, EUROPAN is such a tool in Hungary, which can be competitive with the Hungarian ideas competitions, based on its excellent reputation, large number of “European quality” projects and relatively favorable prize.

With its relative slowness and less implementation oriented, but rather traditionally architectural content can mean benefits for areas, which as a result of their situation do not find their proper use. Moreover it can be useful for those large developers with sites, which in a complex situation, managing their substantial portfolio want to be successful in a long term.

For EUROPAN being more successful, *it is necessary to widen the site-owner target group*, increase the benefits and decrease the number of drawbacks.

From the drawbacks the easiest to come over is the “isolation” of the results from the site owners. *Involving the site owners, and even giving them a key role*, in the process of preparing the brief and evaluating the competition entries, can make EUROPAN more favorable to partners, specially as a tool to generate proper solutions for areas with complex and “unsolvable” problems.

To utilize the benefits – in accordance with the previous – improvement of the communication is necessary in a substantive way at an international and national level too. This calls for widening the target groups of the communication and also changing its content. The target group should be opened for the “inquiring public” which means a more articulated appearance in the “civil” media besides the professional magazines of urban design and architecture (this is also necessary for the site owners to raise the prestige of their area), which means generating more interesting and more easily understandable news for a wider public at a more regular bases. Concerning the content the implementation oriented feature should also be more clearly communicated to the civilians, with emphasizing innovative, economically beneficial aspects of the ongoing projects/implementations.