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Reflections on the Aarhus CA2RE Conference

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REFLECTIONS ON THE AARHUS CA²RE CONFERENCE

CLAUS PEDER PEDERSEN

The third CA²RE Conference took place at Godsbanen, Aarhus, 13-16 April 2018. Aarhus School of Architecture organised the conference in association with ARENA, EAAE and ELIA. CA²RE is an acronym for the Conference for Artistic and Architectural (Doctoral) Research. It aims to create an inviting and inclusive setting where senior and early-career researchers meet to present and discuss research projects and improve research quality through intensive peer-reviews. The CA²RE conferences are biannual events, and the supporting network has been growing since the inaugural CA²RE held at KU Leuven, Ghent in the spring of 2017.

The CA²RE conferences did to no small extent grow out of the ADAPT-r (Architecture, Design and Art Practice Training-research) ITN network. ADAPT-r organised

biannual Practice Research Symposia (PRS) to provide a supervisory structure for the advancement of practice-based PhDs. The biannual symposia became an important event for the sharing and developing of how to structure and improve the research, to share methods and approaches and merely to follow the development of the research.

The CA²RE conference has inherited essential elements from the PRS: CA²RE is organised biannually. It addresses early-stage researchers by focusing on learning and supervision and providing ample time to present and discuss each presentation rather than promoting specific research questions or topics. But there are also significant differences. ADAPT-r addressed a closed group of practice-based PhDs recruited jointly by the partners of the network while CA²RE is an open network associated

with ELIA, EAAE and ARENA. The CA²RE conference wishes to contribute to the expansive and diverse fields that exist in architectural and artistic research, without giving priority to any single approach. The conference supports established research methods but especially welcomes new and emerging approaches and areas such as research by design and artistic/creative practice.

To allow equal access to the conference we have established a two-stage peer-review process. The first stage of peer-review is performed on the submitted abstracts. Each abstract is checked blindly by three independent reviewers. The highest scoring abstracts are admitted for the limited number of presentation slots. Due to growing interest, entry into each conference has been more competitive than for the previous



one. Almost all submissions for the Ghent CA²RE conference in 2017 were accepted. In Ljubljana, about two-thirds of the abstracts were accepted, and in Aarhus 38 of 82 abstracts were allowed.

The second-stage review takes place at the full-paper stage. The authors of accepted abstracts are requested to submit the full paper before the conference, but contrary to most conferences the reviewing takes place at the event. 60 minutes are assigned to each presentation, and the presenters are asked to update their contributions

after the conference in response to the comments of the panel. The panels are also invited to provide feedback on the most successful presentations, which will subsequently be promoted to the AJAR Journal where they will be submitted to further peer-review before their potential publication.

We have chosen this peer-reviewing process in response to CA²RE's ambition of supporting early-stage research and supervision. We are, however, still searching for the right balance between creating an inclusive setting for developing emerging research and providing a

rigorous peer-reviewing. The increasingly competitive selection process might easily exclude researchers who are in the early or messy middle stages of their research, where the research questions are still open-ended or where initial findings have not yet started to fall into place. While it makes sense not to select these contributions for an academic conference, it might be the unresolved or in-between projects that touch upon central questions and challenges in artistic and architectural research and allows productive conversations to unfold. Conversely, from another perspective, the peer-reviewing process might be questioned from



an established academic perspective. We consider the process rigorous. The generous time given to each presentation allows for critical engagement of peers and the face-to-face engagement supports the ability to engage in hybrid modes of presentation that include interaction with artefacts and visual representations as well as performances. However, the second stage review of papers is not blind and thus deviates from recognised academic standards. The CA²RE network will most likely continue to modify and experiment with the format of the conferences in the future to find ways of addressing these challenges.

The CA²RE conferences are not based on specific topics. They address all early-stage researchers within the fields and aim to provide a generous and inclusive frame for the discussion and development of their research projects. The CA²RE conferences value dialogue and discussions highly and allocate substantial time to each presentation to allow for thorough reviews. Despite the lack of a general theme for the conference, some shared topics and research interests emerged across the accepted abstracts. The presentations were organised in three parallel tracks according to

the identified shared interests. A group of abstracts focused on digital design and fabrication, and on technology, construction and tectonics. A second group focused on (architectural) practice and design processes and on artistic research with a particular focus on drawing in architecture. A third group dealt with urbanity, community-building and design and planning processes.

We have used the groupings from the conference to group the papers in the proceedings. This organisation will hopefully help the reader navigate the otherwise quite diverse contributions.

We have deliberately set very few guidelines for the papers and invited the authors to design the layout of their contribution. This freedom has been an invitation to experiment and explore how the interplay of text and visual material can help disseminate research and reflect CA²RE's ambition to support artistic and practice-based research.

Siv Helene Stangeland gave a keynote lecture to open the CA²RE Conference. She is a partner in the Norwegian architectural practice Helen & Hard. This practice formed the empirical foundation of the practice-based PhD that she did at Aarhus School of Architecture as part of the EU-funded ADAPT-r ITN. We invited her to reflect on how the PhD has influenced her practice, and she presented not only an exciting and original research process but also thought-provoking insights into the aim and impact of practice-based research. CA²RE concluded with a workshop titled "Research Methods Training, Supervisor-

ry and Evaluator Training - Relevance of Architectural Research Training". In the workshop PhDs and supervisors were invited to share observation and reflections on the CA²RE weekend as well as more general questions of research in the artistic and architectural fields.

The exhibition FORSK! was organised by Aarhus School of Architecture to coincide with CA²RE. The exhibition was the first joint public presentation of the research carried out by PhDs at Aarhus School of Architecture. The exhibition was actively used in some of the presentations at CA²RE and provided a physical frame for some of the joined discussions.

The CA²RE community is growing, and further conferences are already planned. The next host will be the Berlin Institute for Architecture of the Technische Universität Berlin, and the dates of the conference are 28 September-1 October 2018. Further conferences are

also underway in University of Lisbon, Faculty of Architecture in March/April 2019, KU Leuven, Faculty of Architecture, Campus Sint-Lucas in September/October 2019, Glasgow School of Art, Mackintosh School of Architecture in March/April 2020, Milano, Politecnico di Milano, DASTU - Department of Architecture and Urban Studies in September/October 2020 and in Tallinn, Estonian Academy of Arts, Faculty of Architecture in March/April 2021.

Thank you to all of you who contributed to the Aarhus CA²RE Conference. Your engagement in sharing your research, thoughts and insights contributed significantly to create a generous environment for learning and exchanging ideas. I hope to see you and many new faces to the next CA²RE conference.

Welcome to Berlin in September 2018!

