A Toolbox for Iconic Architecture

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ABSTRACT
The study explores how creation of iconic architecture can be intentionally facilitated using the toolbox inherent in the competition system.

The study defines iconicity as a status a building may gain through intentional process of iconification with participation of the client providing prerequisites, the architect shaping iconic features, the users assigning symbolic values and driving recognition and finally the public acknowledging and celebrating the icon. It is argued that iconicity is never absolute, its span being limited by temporal and social aspects that may expand or contract the span of iconicity, confirming or revoking a building’s status as architectural icon. When employed in the process, competitions provide structure and tools for the first half of iconification work, thus laying the foundation for iconicity. Proficient management of these tools is fundamental for successful iconification.

The study contemplates meaning and role of iconic architecture as an inspiring cultural and temporal landmark of the future as it is envisioned today. Attempts are made to construct a framework for further study of iconicity for theorists and provide an iconification toolbox for practitioners.

This paper is based on inductive modeling of iconification process based on a case study of Uppsala Concert and Congress Hall (Sweden). Cross-disciplinary theoretical considerations draw on writings of Charles Jencks, Hélène Lipstadt, Magnus Rönn, Pierre Bourdieu, Emile Durkheim and other authors.

Keywords
Iconic architecture, iconification, span of iconicity, architectural competition, toolbox
A few words on research topic, method and background

I am not an architect. With all its drawbacks, there is one advantage – I may not be accused of Bourdieu's aesthetic disposition in the field of architecture. Hélène Lipstadt (2007:16) contrasting icons with canons, suggests that “disdain for iconic buildings is inculcated in architectural education along with (...) a respect for canonic buildings”. She builds her argument on French anthropologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu's (2010[1984]) theory of cultural capital and maintains that architect profession of aesthetic disposition abhor the “obviousness [which is] the least common denominator of iconicity in architecture”. I doubt the universality of the statement – there would hardly be any iconic buildings if each and every architect would abhor them. But I am ready to agree that as a layman I am much more excited by easily accessible architectural icons than ordinary---looking deeply coded canons. Thus I have chosen iconic architecture as a topic for the investigative essay (Pipinis, 2013) that this paper is based upon. My work took of with simple explorative question of how architectural icons come into being through architectural competitions, which eventually grew into a theoretical framework of iconification and recommendations on how competitions can be purposefully employed to render iconic outcomes.

This direction of focus was fuelled by Lipstadt's (2007:13) argument that iconic works just “happen”, as opposed to canons that are being “made”. My study challenges her view. I propose that iconic architecture is created intentionally and that competition is a handy tool to that end, but as any tool it needs to be skilfully used in order to achieve desirable results. To support that proposition I would like to present a model of iconification, inductively built on a case study of Uppsala Concert and Congress Hall (Uppsala Konsert & Kongress, UKK) and close reading of texts on architectural quality, architectural competition and iconic architecture by Lipstadt, Jencks, Rönn et al. My experiences in design of business processes as well as studies of anthropology and philosophy of aesthetics have also informed my approach to the task. However, as a product of induction derived from a single case study, the outcome presented does not aspire to absolute truth, but rather suggests a methodological framework for discussion and further elaboration. The “toolbox” rendered by the model is apt for empirical testing and development.

Defining iconicity and its driving forces

So what is the iconic architecture? I know the type of buildings I had in mind when launching my study – Sydney Opera House, Guggenheim in Bilbao, Harpa in Reykjavik, Selfridges in Birmingham. Initially I referred to them as cool buildings, landmark buildings, signature buildings, each term highlighting certain common characteristic, but also simplifying their essence too much -- until I came across Charles Jencks “The Iconic Building” (2005), which sealed the deal. Ancient Greek word eikōn means “likeness, image, portrait”. Within semiotics the word has kept this meaning describing
“a sign that carries resemblance to its referent”\(^1\). In vernacular\(^2\) it covers much wider range of meanings – a legend, a role model, a superstar, the best example of something, an important and enduring symbol, an object of great attention and devotion, a religious painting, a pictogram in computer interface. Connotations with visual pictures, artistry, popular culture, scalability of computer icons, physical manifestations of the immaterial, sacred objects but also with iconoclasm, controversy and cultural contextuality provide richer and more fair reflection of the nature of the architecture at the center for this study. The buildings I perceive as iconic tend to have a distinct silhouette that could be reduced to the size of computer icon without losing its resemblance, they tend to stir feelings being adorned and hated not unlike the religious icons, they make covers of the magazines along with the pop idols and Nobel laureates as outstanding examples of contemporary culture and science. I will return to the meaning and role of iconic architecture towards the end of this paper. For now it would suffice to describe it as distinctively innovative architecture carrying engaging symbolic meanings and attracting attention as a destination in itself.

Although often associated with the contemporary, iconic architecture is not a new phenomenon. Jencks (2005) traces its origins to the old custom of highlighting power and importance within and among the societies through impressive constructions – be it local churches and town halls, royal palaces or ancient wonders of the world. Contemporary icons like The Eiffel Tour or The Gherkin in London merely continue that tradition. To impress the world one needs to create something new, which implies breaking the rules of the “normal”. Aesthetic disposition – that could also be viewed as investment in ability to discern and appreciate the finest points of the tradition – could certainly stand in a way for innovation, but does not have to. In order to break the norm, one needs to know it. And for iconic outcome, one needs to break it with style and sensibility. So at least for some architects their aesthetic disposition should serve not as conservative shackles, but rather as a springboard for innovation.

Jencks attributes contemporary interest for iconic architecture to two driving forces – the economic interest inspired by Bilbao effect\(^3\) and the crisis of the monument. According to him, the void left by weakened ideological movements that previously caused people to build monuments to deities, great ideas or leaders is being filled with iconic buildings as monuments for those who have power today --- the economic power. Typically that would be corporations and institutions willing to manifest their authority and importance through fancy headquarters or public facilities reflecting their identity, values and image as well as the budget. Iconic architecture is thus informed not only

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3 The story of the iconic Guggenheim Museum Bilbao changing economy of Spanish Bilbao is narrated and analysed in many sources, among them in Jencks (2005).
with the architect's experience, taste and creativity, but also with the client's values, visions and financial abilities.

**Span of iconicity: temporal and social aspects**

Anticipated lifetime of significant buildings is more likely centuries than decades. Ideologies, positions of power as well as fashions, tastes and norms will change many times over that period, changing also the context in which iconicity is defined. Whatever image or vision the iconic building is to signify, in order to last, it should employ connotative rather than denotative modes of expression. It should provide cues and excite beholder's imagination, but spell out nothing directly. It should break with the past just as much as with the present, as in Oscar Wilde's words “it's only the modern that ever becomes old---fashioned”. Jencks calls it “enigmatic signifier” quality of the building – something that enables it to be re-interpreted as the time goes by, maintaining its relevance even when the meanings are changing.

Interestingly, this line of reasoning indicates *temporal aspect of the icon*. Eternal relevance may be assumed as client’s as well as architect’s ideal, but if it is dependent on continuous successful re-interpretation, at some point in time it may fail and building may lose its iconicity. If iconicity is dependent on its deviation from the norm as well as on successful interpretation by the publics, it may not be absolute or universal just as no norms or interpretations are ever absolute or universal, always being context-related social constructs.

The temporal aspect notwithstanding, it is most improbable that any building on Earth would ever be known by every single human being on the planet. And even buildings known by many are likely to be regarded differently by different people. A provincial town hall may appear iconic to the citizens who never leaves the town, but quite ordinary in the eyes of those who have seen a dozen of town halls. This indicates presence of the *social aspect* to iconicity describing the circle of individuals acknowledging the building as iconic. The social span may be more or less heterogeneous – same building may be considered iconic in different circles and for different reasons. It could be a local community appreciating the building for its distinct style in the neighbourhood, European community of art lovers appreciating it as the most innovative gallery building in Europe or international architect community considering it as the most exquisite example of certain type of architecture. The latter would even close Lipstadt’s gap between icon and canon – the most canonic building could be seen as architectural icon with the social span of conservative architects.

**Iconification**

If we agree that iconicity has dynamic temporal and social aspects, it would make sense to consider *iconicity* not as a permanent physical feature of the building, but rather as a
status that can be gained, maintained, lost and re-gained within various constituencies over time.

I do not believe that icon can just “happen” – if iconic building is by definition distinct, the architect must have been aware that he or she was breaking some norms when drawing it. The architect’s boldness must be requested or at least accepted by the client; otherwise the design would never leave the paper. And even the most spectacular building erected cannot become famous by itself – its fame (or its wide social span) is a social construct. People must notice it, show it to others and discuss it. Whether it’s a random beholder posting a picture of it on the Instagram, a reviewer publishing an article in the culture pages of the daily or a PR company featuring the building in a campaign at it’s owner’s or user’s request – all those are forms of intentional promotion that potentially widens the social span of iconicity. Even a silent acknowledgment of a building as an icon by any individual experiencing it in real life or through media involves an active internal assessment, which consequently can be revisited for any number of reasons. Making of an icon appears to be an active process and henceforth I will refer to it as a process of iconification.

Iconification – the process in which a building obtains and maintains its status as an icon – involves a number of stakeholders, among which the most prominent are the client, the architect, the user and the beholder. In the competition context, jury enters the process as an additional player that through its constitution, interpretation of client’s vision and assessment of incoming submissions may exercise significant influence on the outcome. The process of iconification may be halted or derailed by any participating player at any step and is not complete until the beholder – or the relevant social span of the public – has acknowledged the building as iconic. Thus, intention on behalf of the client or the architect is not a guarantee for successful iconification. Lipstadt’s view on icons as simply “happening” must be based on this fact. However, I maintain that the public is intentionally influenced in its decision and occasional failure or success of the intention is not the same as unintentional random happening. One of the main aims of this paper is to explore what purposeful techniques may be employed in competition context by the client to increase the chances of successful iconification.

Case selection

Workings of iconification revealed themselves to me through the case study. I was browsing through the Swedish competitions held in accordance with Swedish Association of Architects’ (SAA) standard narrowing down the search to competitions for new construction of culture buildings held in the course of the last 10 years. My intention was to find a newly build icon candidate in my vicinity and explore how it came about, paying special attention to any signs of its intended iconicity and factors

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4 I find such process---based view of iconicity fully consistent with Cold’s (1989:39) description of architectural quality as originating from interaction and thus not static.
5 Swedish Association of Architects homepage http://www.arkitekt.se
that may have promoted or inhibited iconic outcome. I assumed that clients for culture buildings are especially likely to be interested in iconic outcomes since they ought to be befitting culture houses’ general aim to attract visitors and might also be inspired by the *Bilbao effect*. The time limit was based on assumption that relevant information on recent competitions should be easier accessible than on the older ones.

Out of 4 projects that fit the criteria (6 competitions for new culture buildings were held since 2000 in accordance with SAA standard, but 2 of the winning proposals were never erected), Uppsala Concert and Congress Hall (Uppsala Konsert & Kongress, UKK) drew my attention with its distinct façade, geographical proximity and multiple awards confirming its iconic potential. To make a full disclosure, roughly a year prior to this study, following a friend with even stronger interest in iconic architecture, I had made a special trip to Uppsala in order to see and photograph UKK. Internet search showed also a vast array of material available, including pre-history of the competition as well as evaluation of the actual building after its first few years in operation.

**Brief overview of the case**

Uppsala is the 4th largest Swedish city with population of 200,000 located some 70 km north of the capital. 40,000 students study in the colleges located here, among them – in the oldest university in Scandinavia, Uppsala University. City has a rich cultural life, but has been lacking a befitting concert venue.

In February 2002 City of Uppsala announced a competition with the task to “design a building of high architectural quality offering best thinkable facilities for concerts and other musical events as well as for congresses and conferences” also described as “a character building for the new Uppsala”. The task was complicated by necessity to take stance on preservation (with or without incorporation into the new building) or demolition of the existing buildings on site, considered to be of significant cultural historical value, but in poor condition at the time. The competition program laid out in 20 pages did not offer an exhaustive list of criteria, but rather open-ended descriptions of client’s visions and issues of particular concern. While submissions were welcome in Swedish and English, competition materials were only available in Swedish.

The jury consisted of 7 politicians reflecting the power balance in the City Council, 2 senior city officials and 2 architects delegated by Swedish Association Of Architects. The prize pot amounted to SEK 1,000,000.

135 submissions were received. The jury was unable to reach a unanimous vote and eventually selected proposal by Henning Larsen Tegnestue A/S (Denmark) as a winner with 2 politicians endorsing a runner-up instead.

The project itself was controversial, its origins dating as far back as to 1910, with several failed realization attempts over the time. Controversy surrounded the project in the City Council and in the public debate before, during and after the competition of 2002 as well. Social democrats and their allies maintained the power in the City Council from
announcement of the competition until initiation of the building project and thus were able to realize Henning Larsens design with some amendments.\footnote{It is interesting to note that political jurors were voting on the project in the City Council along with their respective party line, thus some of the jurors who were voting in favour of the winning project in the competition voted against it being realized in the City Council. This suggests that contrary to popular expectation, jury representing wide political spectrum is not a guarantee for realization of controversial projects in case of change of power, its actual role boiling down to mediation of the tastes.}

UKK was opened to the public in 2007. Initial critical public opinion has changed over time with approval ratings picking up from 37\% to 57\% during 2006---2009 (Karlsson, Zere 2011). The building has received several architectural awards and even more nominations – Gold Medal at Bienal Miami+Beach in 2007, Stora Samhällsbyggarpriset in 2008 (“Great Community Builder’s Prize”), and nomination for Sweden’s most prestigious architectural prize Kasper Salinpriset 2007 to mention a few.

**Communication of iconic aspirations by the client**

It is the client who shapes and enables the process by formulating the problem to be solved and/or goals to be achieved, sets the rules of the game, provides resources and creates stimuli as well as selection mechanism for other players to join in. These decisions inevitably influence the outcome of the process and therefore should be made with greatest care even if there is some room for later amendments, as we will see. For the purpose of this particular study I will focus inquiry on the aspects of architectural process that are most central to iconification in the context of architectural competition. City of Uppsala did not mention iconicity even once in its competition program (Tävlingsprogrammet, 2002), but visionary descriptions of “a character building for the future---oriented Uppsala”, “a character building of significant importance”, “a building powerful enough to bridge the historical borders in the city fabric” as well as readiness to demolish valuable historical buildings for it indicated quite clearly that something of iconic proportions was being envisioned. But if Uppsala wanted an icon, why didn’t they spell it out? Direct request for iconic building might easier catch an eye of an architect interested in drawing one (and keep away the ones who find it unworthy endeavor), especially when neither city’s, client’s nor object’s names are directly associated with potentially iconic ambitions (as names like Guggenheim or objects like opera house for a major capital city might be). However, terminology of iconicity is not clearly established and may also carry controversial connotations of “celebrity architecture”, “pop culture” or a drastic contrast to its environment, making it more difficult to agree upon by the client’s decision making body.\footnote{In the light of Lipstadts earlier presented argument, it might also be interesting to investigate how architects would interpret and relate to explicit iconicity criteria in the program – would it have the right effect in attracting respectively scaring off candidates and informing their proposals or not.} Further research into the subject establishing clear terminology might facilitate more efficient client – architect communication and iconic expectation management.
Since competition program did not provide exhaustive list of criteria, but rather communicated through visionary descriptions and points of concern, I found it useful to attempt a textual analysis of these descriptions trying to assess the client’s priorities and iconicity’s place in their hierarchy. As a tool for this analysis I used Rönn’s (2010) categories of quality criteria. Through attribution of each program statement resembling a criterion/an instruction to one of these categories and counting them, the following picture appeared (all categorized statements are quoted in Pipinis, 2013):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Related to Iconicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensemble (entirety/wholeness) and concept [EC]</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context and environment [CE]</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness and functionality [EF]</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance solution [ES]</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy and technical solutions [ET]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development potential [DP]</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Categorisation of criterion-like statements in the competition programme

Iconicity was thus present in 3 out of 32 criterion-like statements of the competition program, all of them in concept category. Unsurprisingly, functionality and concept was among most elaborated categories, while a bit more surprisingly economical and developmental aspects were hardly touched at all. This analytical method will be further elaborated in the study of how jury was applying the criteria in selection of the winner.

The client has decided to adopt the SAA competition standard and was initially recommended by SAA a two step open competition format, suggesting that destiny of the existing valuable buildings on site should be decided in the first step, allowing the jury to focus on the building itself in the second step (Offer, 2001). SAA motivated choice of open competition with traditionally wide media coverage of such competitions and claimed that attractiveness of the task itself would pose virtually no risk of getting ignored by established architects. SAA anticipated most submissions to come from Sweden and also some from other Nordic countries, in total amounting to at least 100---150. If non---Nordic architects were to be attracted, SAA recommended to employ Swedish and English as official languages.

The City of Uppsala, after further discussions, settled for an open one step competition accepting submissions in Swedish and English, but providing competition materials only in Swedish. Acceptance of established standard, choice of open competition and openness for submissions in English indicates that client was interested in publicity and attention from a wider circle of established architects, which may also indicate interest in iconic outcome. However, it is odd that competition materials were not provided in

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8 In this context it is interesting to mention that eventually the winning design had to be reworked to fit the economic limits, which arguably may have affected iconicity of the outcome.
English when welcoming of submissions in English clearly signals interest to attract non-Nordic architects.

The turnout was within the prediction of SAA: 134 submissions (plus one that missed the deadline and was not considered) out of which 80 (59%) were Swedish, 26 (19%) other Nordic and 29 (22%) from 8 other countries including one non-European, from Argentina. The effect of language barrier is impossible to assess without further research, but it is worth mentioning that some of the participating non-Nordic companies had Swedish names among their representatives. Therefore we do not know how many companies without Swedish connection that successfully negotiated the threshold, just as we don’t know how many did not even try because of it.

Composition of the jury is another important message from the client. UKK jury consisted of 11 jurors and was chaired by the head of the city government. 6 jurors (plus the chair) represented all major political parties in the City Council. 2 senior city officials, architects by profession, were also aboard. Finally, in accordance with the standard, SAA delegated 2 independent architects – one Swedish, with previous experience of concert hall design, and one foreign, from a highly reputed firm with several iconic projects in its portfolio. Full political rainbow headed by city’s most powerful politician and city executives in charge clearly signifies seriousness of the client and importance of the project. Four architects covering local, national and international perspectives as well as specific experience in both concert halls and iconic architecture signifies ability to evaluate the submissions on a very professional level. Such a jury clearly sends a message that submissions will be taken seriously, adding to the competition prestige as well as realistic chance of construction of the winning design.

Even if the main prize for the winner is the assignment itself – along with the honors – the prize pot sends also a certain message about the credibility and attractiveness of the client and competition. City of Uppsala followed recommendation by SAA when announcing a prize pot of SEK 1,000,000 (some EUR 120,000), whereas first prize would not be below SEK 300,000 and smallest prize will not go under SEK 50,000.

To sum it up, through the choice of competition’s standard and form, language, criteria, jury and the prize pot, City of Uppsala communicated a message consistent with a desire to erect an iconic building. More explicit iconic aspirations among the criteria as well as availability of competition program in English might have strengthened the message further. Composition of the jury from communication point of view was impeccable.

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9 Interviews with the decision makers could shed more light on the discussions preceding the formulation of competition program and whether iconic outcome was actually desired and if it was consensual, but it is not essential for the task at hand, which is to identify the levers available to the client contemplating construction of an icon.

10 Promotion of the competition itself by other means than selection and fine-tuning of its parameters falls outside of the scope of this essay, but there certainly are a number of marketing and PR techniques available for the clients interested in attracting more attention to the competition from the architects and the public.
Identification of iconic potential by the jury

Let's see how the jury was applying those rather open-ended criteria and how it contributed to the iconicity of the outcome. For that purpose I chose to apply same type of textual analysis on the jury's evaluating comments (Juryutlåtande, 2002) to the best submissions as I earlier used for analysis of the criteria themselves, only here I also kept track of which of the jury's statements that were related to the criteria-like statements in the competition program and which were not, thus highlighting additional criteria introduced by the jury itself. This approach does not reveal the dynamics or causality in the jury's work that interviews with the jurors or participating observation might do, but considering simplicity of the method it rendered fairly interesting results that in a larger study could help to formulate relevant hypothesis and questions for follow-up interviews. In this study for the purpose of inductive model construction, I am more helped by "whats" that this method highlights than "whys" which it does not.

The table below provides the summary of this analysis. First column lists the competition program along with the best submissions selected by the jury (1-4 places and unranked honorary mentions marked by "H"). The title row indicates the quality evaluation categories from Rönn (2010) divided into positive and negative comments, with addition of J-column for criteria added by the jury on its own; SUM-column summing up total number of positive or negative comments; *-column for iconicity-related statements among the SUM; and Tot-column summing up positive and negative SUM-columns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competition program</th>
<th>Positive comments</th>
<th>Negative comments</th>
<th>Tot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EC</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>EF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uppsala Kristallen</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONO</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Röda Mattan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ytor av ljus</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hi i flöde</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H Basfiol &amp; flöjt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H rymd</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUAGES</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23005</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYMÅNE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEARTBEAT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jury’s motivation is its primary tool to justify its verdict in the eyes of interested parties including the public, so it is not surprising that most comments were made about the winning submission and its runner-ups. Considering the jury’s inability to reach a unanimous decision, it also makes sense that first runner-up has received relatively many critical comments, as supporters of the winner most likely have had to argue a lot why no 2 was only second best.

Curiously, the only column with values in exactly same order as the final ranking of the best submissions is the iconicity column. Categorization method used is unavoidably subjective and superficial, thus no scientific conclusions may be based on this outcome. However, it helps to identify possible tendencies that may be used for formulation of hypothesis to be verified by other methods. In this particular case, the outcome is consistent with suggestion that the jury was looking for iconic design. Overall largest number of positive comments in concept category and of negative comments in functionality column suggests that jury relied on appeal of the concepts for selection of the most interesting solutions while using functional shortcomings to narrow down the list, which seems to be a reasonable approach. Since iconicity is a conceptual matter, it also makes sense that iconic design draws attention of the jury, but then is assessed on its functional merits.

If jury would be averse to iconic architecture, iconic criteria would be more likely to appear in the negative half of the table for design being too bold or creating too dramatic contrast to surrounding environment etc. In our case two negative iconicity points are the opposite, submissions were criticised for insufficient iconicity. “May” was described as “too quiet and powerless”, “Röda mattan” “might be perceived as too dated”. Positive iconicity points were awarded to comments like “monumental”, “simple cubistic sculptural form”, “unique character claiming its place along with other landmarks” etc.

Notably, some iconicity-related comments were in the J-column as well, thus iconicity was being promoted by the jury on its own, without explicit support in the competition program. It was also only jury that highlighted and evaluated building's potential as attraction for tourists and other visitors, when competition program was exclusively about services to city’s inhabitants. It was only jury that discussed “news value and artistic quality” or approvingly referred to Centre Pompidou or fashion design as sources of inspiration for some submissions. Jury paid also attention to the light, views and usage of materials that were not mentioned in the competition program.

Without access to actual discussions that were taking place among the jurors, it is impossible to know which juror contributed what to the discussion, criteria and evaluation. Previous competition research indicates that jury often chooses to re-interpret the criteria based on the submissions received. My textual analysis confirms that this was the case also in UKK competition. I would argue that presence of client’s top decision makers in the jury must be important factor to allow such modus operandi. At the same time it may be expected that independent jury members, especially if they
have relevant background as they did in UKK case, may also come with relevant additional experiences and perspectives that were not available when preparing the program. Scruton (2007:126) notes that “most users of a building are not clients of the architect; they are passers by, the residents, the neighbours: those whose horizon is invaded and whose sense of home is affected by this new intrusion”. Public sector projects offer rare objection to Scruton – all the users of the buildings mentioned by him are the members of the public, which in this case also is the client, represented by its elected politicians. Wide political spectrum represented in the jury hopefully also represents wide spectrum of aesthetic disposition or the lack of it, which should also help to select the winner whose expression reverberates with wider circles of the public, increasing social span of iconicity.

The competition system provides thus a special mechanism to close the gap between Bourdieu’s taste for freedom and taste for necessity and to widen the span of iconicity of its outcome – the jury. This mechanism needs though to be appropriately tuned in order to be efficient.

**Realization of iconic potential by the architect and the builder**

Four months after the jury’s decision, in October 2002, City Council decided to start planning for construction of the winning proposal and incorporated a company for that purpose. An intense public debate followed the decision – representatives for local academia and business endorsed the project, while a number of other stakeholders opposed it fiercely. Advantages of the world-class venue for music and conventions were weighted against the loss of historic buildings in the area, other priorities in public spending, questionable economic feasibility of the project, insufficient involvement of the citizens in decision-making, but also against the extravagance of the building design itself. All in all, the buzz was not dissimilar to one surrounding erection of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The project was at the center of public attention, engaging and stirring feelings. It was not an ordinary building from the very outset.

Eventually, with 49 votes against 32, City Council approved the construction in the spring of 2004. According to Bengtsson (2012), decision was contested in court only two weeks later, however unsuccessfully. Same source indicates that the project was revised in order to secure City Council’s approval – for example, number of seats was decreased from 1,350 to 1,150 and titanium surface coating was substituted with less expensive aluminum.

The corner stone was laid in April 2005 and the building was opened in September 2007. According to the Final Report (Slutrapport, 2008), construction cost was MSEK 580. Wording of the report is somewhat confusing admitting some budget overruns due

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11 Conceptualised by Bourdieu (2010 [1984]), *taste for necessity* refers to tendency of unprivileged classes to perceive their lack of options as their own free choice, while *taste for freedom* refers to holders of *aesthetic disposition*, the refined taste for less obvious finer points developed by the privileged classes just because they have the means and freedom to do so.
to project changes as well as changes in the market prices in the course of the
construction, while also claiming certain cost savings for construction and future
exploitation (e.g. due to changed air conditioning system) as well as improved future
revenue potential (e.g. from additional conference facilities). The report maintains that
overall budget was kept and gives no indication that iconic ambitions might have been
sacrificed in the course of the project; to the contrary, “construction of a monumental
building with special designs” was offered as explanation for “price-wise negative effect
on the project”.

Illustrations below show the design that won the competition and the building that was
actually erected for reader’s own assessment of iconicity in each case and effect of the
construction phase to iconification process.

Image 1: The Uppsala Crystal as presented in the winning proposal to the jury.
Source:  http://www.arkitekt.se/s7576/f1174
Promotion of iconicity by the users

How did the users of the building carry on iconification? Interestingly, on my earlier visit to Uppsala, I had completely missed the building despite it being just a few blocks away from the train station. Nothing in the city prompted me to look for it either – nothing in the postcards, nothing on the billboards or anywhere else in the public space. So I was in for surprise when my architecture---savvy friend some time later suggested to visit Uppsala to see the UKK.

While working on the essay I visited Uppsala again. This time I could catch a glimpse of UKK’s façade when going uphill from the train station (the view that might have been blocked by other ongoing construction at the time of my previous visit), discreetly peeking out from behind of other buildings when looking from one of the city’s main streets, but clearly rising above the city’s skyline when watching from the top of the hill where the Uppsala Castle is located. While dominant in its immediate vicinity, for a major landmark I found it still a rather low---key one. More surprisingly, the building was not making much fuzz about itself on the Internet either – none of UKK’s own, Uppsala City’s, Destination Uppsala’s (Uppsala Tourist Board) or UKK’s architect’s homepages featured the building upfront. If you purposefully look for it, you will eventually find it, but it won’t jump out at you by itself as Eiffel Tower, Sydney Opera or Globe Arena will – either as a photograph, a logotype, a pictogram etc.
Images 3---5: UKK in relation to the old Uppsala train station building; a glimpse of UKK from one of the major streets; Uppsala Cathedral – one of the main “classic” landmarks of Uppsala.
Photo: Justas Pipinis.
I called the CEO of UKK to find out his relation to the building and what I perceived to be its unexpectedly low-key presence in the city space. CEO Magnus Bäckström assured me that the building was the main reason why he accepted the position and moved to Uppsala; it happened when City Council decided to start planning for the construction of the winning proposal. While not having been engaged in the competition itself, Bäckström was instrumental in supervision of the construction of the building and in shaping its activities. At the same time he was very surprised that the building could be perceived as low-key. In CEOs view UKK was already well-established venue not only locally and nationally, but also internationally. The building itself was according to him always present in communication and marketing, it also was reflected in the logotype of the UKK. The logo was indeed derived from geometry of the building\textsuperscript{12}, but to a point of non-resemblance. According to CEO it was a conscious choice, as too obvious replication of the building’s silhouette in the logo would not have fairly reflected high level of creativity of the activities taking place in there. Participation of the building in UKK’s communication was explained in a similar manner – it was most in communication tonality and color scheme that its unique and bold architecture was reflected. I found the reasoning to be a striking example of aesthetic disposition where codes for the initiated are valued higher than easy access to the public.

\textsuperscript{12} Development of the logo is presented on http://www.stockholmdesignlab.se/en/projects/ukk/ukk--logotype/
It is not my business to assess appropriateness of this approach, as it would require another type of study altogether. I can also sympathize with CEO’s view that activities in the building should not be over-shadowed by the building itself. However, from iconification point of view, I do not see that the two need to be contrasted either, to the contrary – if the fame of the building would bring more visitors to its activities, it should be just as good as music lovers and congress delegates getting exposed to fine architecture; there should be plenty of synergy between the two. Subduing building’s role in communication or wrapping it in codes could arguably increase iconicity span in certain circles, but likely at the cost of iconification among wider publics. My main argument here is that what users do with the building is also part of iconification. If strength of iconic power is to be measured, the wider the social span and the more relevant symbolism at any time that the building can be informed with, the more iconic it will be.

**Recognition of the icon by the publics**

How iconic The Concert & Congress Hall did Uppsala get? The final answer is with each and every beholder – and as long as iconification is ongoing it is never completely final, as it is a subject for continuous reassessment. A separate survey would be needed to try and quantify the span of its iconicity at any given time. Here I will merely discuss it
against the background of initial discussion of iconicity as well as some evaluations found in secondary sources.

Building’s silhouette does have a pictogramic quality – its geometric shape could be reduced to a pictogram maintaining recognition even if it might not be as distinct as Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin or Herzog & de Meuron’s Bird’s Nest in Beijing. The name under which this design was submitted to the competition – “The Uppsala Crystal” – suggests one meaning to its form – “a reference to non-organic nature of a crystal” in a building that in the twilight “turns itself into a crystal or a prism with multiple intersections” (Bengtsson, 2012). However, its design does not restrain imagination to a gem. During its construction, some locals called it a “nuclear reactor” referring to its bold industrial shape contrasting softer lines of historical surroundings (ibid). I associated its asymmetrically turned volumes with Rubik Cube, while vertically mirrored carve-outs anchors it in the ground as much as in the sky – earthly congresses and heavenly music, perhaps? In my view it passes for the Jenck’s *enigmatic signifier.*
The building conveys a number of meanings – some of them relate to the silhouette of the building, others originate from activities taking place inside, yet another from interaction with its environment or the public debate preceding its construction. Associations with the concerts and congresses are obvious for musicians, concertgoers, congress organizers and others who are privy to the name and type of activities the building is dedicated for. But building is also symbolic for rejuvenation and invigoration of eastern parts of Uppsala. HUI Research Report (Karlsson & Zere, 2011) even titles one chapter “UKK – a symbol for the new Uppsala” claiming that “several of interlocutors in deep interviews have said that UKK has become a kind of symbol for the emerging new dynamic Uppsala”. It also states that public opinion has changed in favor of UKK over time – citizen’s approval rating increased from 37% in 2006 to 57% in 2009. Bengtsson (2012) claims that UKK “has the same dignity as other historical landmarks” like Uppsala Castle, Uppsala Cathedral and Carolina Rediviva (University Library from 1819). “UKK launched this construction boom and earlier opposition to this new style and new identity of the place is now part of the history” (ibid). It is thus reasonable to conclude that the building has rich symbolism characteristic of an icon.

Assessment of the span is more complicated. It is reasonable to assume that citizens of Uppsala are well aware of the building due to its fairly central location as well as to the
century old public debate that eventually produced it. Hotel occupancy rates over 7 years following opening of UKK have increased by 30%, which is roughly on the same level as for the whole of Sweden during the period, nothing like the 1,000% increase in Bilbao after opening of Guggenheim. However, the building has received 4 architectural awards (one of them international) and another 6 nominations for awards (three of them international).

To conclude I would say that “The Uppsala Crystal” qualifies as a local icon in Uppsala for the time being. Its iconicity span might also be wider as national and international awards and nominations, as well as good reputation among international musicians (as claimed by UKK CEO) prompt, but I have no sufficient data to confirm that. Then again, iconicity is a status that needs to be maintained and/or developed. The City of Uppsala, the jury, the architect and the builder have done their part; further iconification or its discontinuation is in the hands of users and beholders.

Why icons?

Why would iconic architecture matter? There is no evidence that Bilbao effect would have been replicated to the same extent by anybody else. Monumental commemoration of holders of economic power is hardly in the interest of any wider circle. Finally, if centuries of trial and error have rendered some recognized canonic norms of architecture – how could it make sense to break against them?

To answer that question I would like to invoke the religious connotations of the icon against the background of the works of French sociologist Émile Durkheim. Durkheim (1964[1915]) described religion as society worshiping itself. I suggest that the same principle is at work with iconic architecture. Its attraction comes from it being perceived and celebrated as a physical manifestation of the pinnacle of contemporary scientific and creative mind. When admiring architectural icons society admires less the corporates and institutions that have built them, but more its own collective creative ability, its technological progress and assumed ability to form its future. Architectural icon is thus not only a geographical landmark, but also a temporal landmark showing the way to the future, breaking new grounds, embodying new ideals and new visions of the possible.

Iconic architecture is thus more status than a genre, a status that is kept as long as the icon means something relevant, as long as it is functional as a landmark for innovation, inspiration and the unusual. It may not be difficult to just break the rules; just as easy it should be to create disposable icons that quickly get disenchanted, ordinary and dated. The real challenge is to break the rules in a way that keeps inspiring and tantalizing senses of wide populations for decades and centuries, still feeling fresh and relevant, almost within the reach – as it stands there – but yet unattainable, as something that came back from the future just to let us know that its worth moving ahead. Local icons fill the same important function, only on a smaller scale, just as The Uppsala Crystal is showing the way to the “new dynamic Uppsal”.
Finally, the toolbox

Drawing on the critical decision moments having bearing on iconification in the case study, the following iconification toolbox may be assembled:

- For selection of the form of competition:
  - Do adopt established competition standard
  - Do consider open competition
  - Don’t forget to include English among the official languages

- For composition of the jury:
  - Do include renowned foreign architect with iconic portfolio
  - Do include client’s decision makers
  - Don’t limit the jury to the holders of aesthetic disposition

- For competition program:
  - Do communicate your iconic ambitions explicitly
  - Do communicate your budget or other limitations
  - Don’t forget to provide the program in English

- For design:
  - Do consider a pictogramic silhouette for the building
  - Do envision its shape as a timeless enigmatic signifier
  - Don’t employ too denotative or dated symbolism

- For facilitation of iconification throughout the lifetime of the building:
  - Do promote the competition
  - Do promote the building suggesting relevant meanings
  - Don’t inhibit the iconification by passivity or too deep coding

The competition covers only first steps of the iconification process – the client’s conception of iconic vision in a brief and architect’s endeavour to realize it by design mediated by the jury that is called to identify the iconic quality. The task itself as well as organisation of the competition and its terms and conditions have to be right in order to generate design proposals with the potential to become iconic buildings. While insufficient to guarantee successful iconification, these steps build the necessary foundation for the whole process.

The last and critical stages of iconification are, however, in the hands of the users and the public and here I agree with Lipstadt that the public is ultimately in control. However, clients, architects and users can influence perception of the public by design of the building and its symbolism, by means of PR & marketing, by accessibility and recognition management. The public will seldom – if ever – iconify a building that was not conceived as iconic by either its creators or its users. An icon cannot be inconspicuous – and buildings do not get conspicuous by chance. The competition system provides an excellent setting, motivation and inspiration to conception of embryos of iconic architecture.
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