
EDITORS' NOTES A TRIBUTE TO CHRISTIAN NORBERG-SCHULZ, ALONG WITH SOME EDITORIAL COMMENTS

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This mixed issue includes six contributions, five scientific articles and one debate article published in the Forum section at the end of the journal. We hope that you enjoy reading all the contributions. Before presenting the scientific contributions, we would like to offer a tribute to Christian Norberg-Schulz, who was born in Oslo in 1926, and to draw attention to the fact that he would have celebrated his one-hundredth birthday this year.

In 1964, Norberg-Schulz became a Doctor of Technology in Architecture at the Norwegian Institute of Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim. His doctoral thesis is titled *Intentions in Architecture* and was published by The MIT Press. Norberg-Schulz was appointed as a professor at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO) in 1966 and was then the first dean of the school from 1983 to 1986. In 1974, he was a visiting professor at the Architecture Department of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT. Norberg-Schulz was a significant researcher in the Nordic countries and was internationally recognized and published, often cited in articles within architecture and landscape architecture. He was, for example, included in the Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965–1995, titled *Theorizing a new agenda for architecture*, which was edited by Kate Nesbitt and published in 1996. The chapter on him is titled “The phenomena of place”. Two well-known books by him are *Meaning in Western Architecture* of 1974 and *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* of 1979. They have been widely influential at a global level. Norberg-Schulz is recognized as a key figure in the topic of architectural phenomenology, even though Google Scholar shows only 1300 quotes from the two books.

There are at least three published doctoral theses, as well as ongoing PhD projects, focussing on Norberg-Schulz as an architect. In 2007, Gro Lauland published a doctoral thesis in the Norwegian language at AHO titled *Work and Conditions: Christian Norberg-Schulz's theory of place seen from the perspective of a philosophy of architecture* (Verk and vilkår. Christian Norberg-Schulz' stedsteori i et arkitekturfilosofisk perspektiv). Anna Ulrikke Andersen produced a thesis in 2018–19 titled *Ten windows following Christian Norberg-Schulz: Framing, mobility and self-reflection through the fenestral essay film*. Hendrik Auret published a thesis titled *Care, Place and Architecture: A critical reading of Christian Norberg-Schulz's architectural interpretation of Martin Heidegger's philosophy* at the Department of Architecture, University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, in 2025. In 1994, *The Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* published a theme issue on phenomenology and architecture. The first contribution in this special issue is an article in the Norwegian language by Norberg-Schulz titled "Place Use" (Stedsbruk). In this text, Norberg-Schulz summarizes the architect's mission, which is to manifest respect towards interpretation in the architectural project and to contribute to the realization of the place itself. The article is based on a lecture that Norberg-Schulz gave in 1992 at a symposium on architectural theories.

But now back to the articles. The first scientific article in this issue was written by PhD student Rikke Borg Sundstrup and Professor Claus Bech-Danielsen, both of whom are affiliated with Aalborg University, Denmark. Their contribution is titled "Design for everyday encounters or parallel living in tenure-mixed areas". The idea of the social interweaving of citizens in cities based on tenure mix is part of the agenda in current debates on planning and urban design in Denmark. The authors point out that contemporary policies have a strong focus on transforming disadvantaged neighbourhood blocks so as to ensure mixed housing areas where everybody, regardless of income, is supposed to be given equal access to the built environment. Segregation should be bridged in part through architecture and urban design and mixed tenure. The policy leaves significant decisions to architects, planners, and developers regarding how tenure mix is spatially implemented. Tenure mix is seen as something good in society based on assumptions about the positive social effects of residents from different social positions living within close proximity and encountering each other on an everyday basis.

In the article, the authors explore how various spatial configurations shape life in residential areas. Can the policy achieve its good intentions of a social mix in cities or will it instead reinforce parallel lives among residents? This is a question of great importance in all the Nordic welfare countries, not only in Denmark. Based on a case study comparing four housing areas, the authors investigate how tenure mix is put into practice. They use architectural analysis, on-site observations, in-depth

interviews, and mappings of residents' use of their housing areas. The study shows that in transformed neighbourhoods with mix tenure types, spatial configurations and tenure types influence the degree of social mixing in everyday life. The findings underscore the importance of architectural design in shaping encounters within tenure-mixed housing areas. This exploration also highlights how a tenure mix sets different spatial conditions for either facilitating everyday encounters or reinforcing divides among citizens in cities.

"Who is vulnerable? Finnish housing designers' roles and perspectives" is the second scientific article, written by Annika Ritonummi, a PhD Researcher at the University of Oulu, Finland. This article investigates how vulnerability is understood and addressed by Finnish housing design practitioners. Ritonummi examines how designers define vulnerability, which factors they consider, and how they respond to the needs of individuals in vulnerable positions. The theory, methods, and data are clearly presented. Amartya Sen's "capability approach" is used as a theoretical lens for exploring vulnerability in housing, highlighting how wellbeing depends on both *functioning* and *capability*. A challenge in research on vulnerability and its effects on housing wellbeing is, however, that people in vulnerable conditions do not form a clearly definable group with shared typical needs. A home is not just a physical resource but can also facilitate or obstruct living and agency. The empirical data consists of ten in-depth interviews with architectural designers with experience in designing for vulnerable populations.

The analysis of the interviews shows how practitioners conceptualize vulnerability, perceive their professional roles, and navigate power dynamics in the design process. The findings suggest that vulnerability in housing does not stem from a misalignment between users' needs and the built environment. Design stands out as a divisive issue in a difficult assignment. The designers interviewed frequently reflect on the role of the architect in the housing production process and how their design decisions can indirectly affect the vulnerability of residents. They often emphasize that design relates to future residents who are unknown as individuals when new housing is designed. For this reason, Ritonummi also highlights the importance of acknowledging diverse starting points and varying needs in the design of residential environments.

The third scientific article, "Adaptability in school architecture: Stakeholder-informed criteria from early-stage evaluation", by PhD Student Efthymia Ratsou Stæhr, Associate Professor Tor Kristian Stevik, Associate Professor Leif Daniel Houck, and Associate Professor Ulf Rydningen, all of them affiliated with the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Norway. They examine adaptability in school buildings and the assessment of it in the early stages of the design process. The study is situated within a broader discussion on building longevity, sustainability, and the

capacity of the built environment to respond to changing pedagogical, demographic, and societal needs. School buildings can no longer be understood solely as spaces for education; they increasingly function as multifunctional community infrastructures that must accommodate both short- and long-term transformations. The article focusses in particular on architectural competitions as key arenas for decision-making, in which adaptability should already be identified and evaluated in the early design phase. The aim is to identify core decision-making criteria that enable adaptability to be assessed systematically and comparatively across design proposals.

The findings indicate that adaptability is widely recognized as an important objective, although its meaning and priorities vary across professional groups. Rather than being defined by a single design feature, adaptability emerges through the interplay of structural solutions, spatial organization, and material strategies, which together enable both everyday flexibility and long-term transformation. At the same time, the study reveals a number of practical challenges that continue to hinder its implementation. The article proposes a stakeholder-informed evaluation framework that can support decision-making in the planning and competition phases of school building projects. More broadly, the study underscores the need for a shared, interdisciplinary understanding of adaptability as a fundamental component of sustainable and future-oriented built environments.

The fourth scientific article, “Learning from Hiroshi Sambuichi: Critical regionalism revisited”, by Associate Professor Sidsel Sander, explores how contemporary architecture can address climate challenges while sustaining a strong sense of place. Drawing on six case studies from Japan’s Setouchi region, the article examines the work of architect Hiroshi Sambuichi through the lenses of critical regionalism and architectural phenomenology. The study identifies three key principles that characterize Sambuichi’s practice: the integration of moving and inert materials, iterative site reading, and tectonic clarity. Rather than approaching buildings as sealed and technologically optimized objects, Sambuichi’s architecture engages actively with its environment, working with wind, water, light, and terrain as integral design elements. In this way, climate regulation is achieved through passive and low-tech means, while simultaneously generating rich sensory and atmospheric qualities.

Methodologically, the article combines field observations with comparative and phenomenological analyses, highlighting how environmental performance is not only a technical issue but also an experiential one. By bringing together Frampton’s critical regionalism and Pallasmaa’s emphasis on multisensory experience and temporality, the study offers a nuanced perspective on climate-responsive design. Importantly, the ar-

ticle also discusses the transferability of these principles to Nordic contexts. It suggests that Sambuichi's approach provides valuable insights for adaptive reuse, low-tech resilience, and the activation of local material and environmental resources. The article thus presents climate adaptation as a culturally embedded and site-specific practice that offers an alternative to more standardized approaches to sustainability.

The fifth and final scientific article, by Eskild Narum Bakken, is in the Norwegian language and is titled "Estetikkbestemmelser i Norske byggesaker: Historisk utvikling og nåtidig anvendelse" (Aesthetic provisions in Norwegian building regulations: Historical development and current application). Narum Bakken is an associate professor at the Norwegian University of Technology and Science. His article starts by noting that aesthetics has increasingly become a focus in the public debate about architecture in the Nordic countries, driven by associations such as Arkitekturopprøret, which, translated into English, means "architectural uprising" or "architectural rebellion".¹ The return to aesthetics and beauty so as to guide the built environment is a pattern that can also be seen in England, where the report *Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission*, published in 2021, provides a governmental response to criticism and calls for an updating of the National Planning Policy Framework. The idea is to ensure high-quality design in the planning system.² In Norway, aesthetic concerns have been a part of the building code for a long time. The sources in the article consist of building regulations, related public guidelines, legal explanations, statements of principle, circulars, et cetera. Narum Bakken addresses the history of the regulations, covering the development, starting already in 1827, up to their alteration in 2025. At the local level, building permit applications in the 1980s and 1990s were reviewed on a restrictive interpretation of the regulations in the law. This, in turn, led to the development of government guidance to support and uphold aesthetic intentions in the law. The current law, from 2008, is characterized in the article as a simplification and a partial invisibility of aesthetic requirements, combined with inconsistent legal language. The public recommendations to improve aesthetic qualities in architecture in the 1990s have not been updated to reflect the 2008 legislation, despite the fact that aesthetic requirements were included in the mandate by the Law Committee. For this reason, Narum Bakke suggest that there is a need for a renewed revision of the building code so as to enable its originally intended function of making the law operate as an authority on maintaining beauty in the built environment.

The Forum section of the journal contains a debate article in the Swedish language by Rolf Johansson, Professor Emeritus at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. The title of his contribution is "Vad är en akademisk essä?" (What is an academic essay?). Architecture as a research subject, discipline, and professional practice combines both art and science. This is a starting point for Johansson. He initially notes that

1 See <https://www.arkitekturopproret.no/> [all URLs here accessed in April 2026].

2 See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-building-better-building-beautiful-commission>.

the *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* publishes scientific articles and academic essays. He then comments on the two review templates that the journal uses for the peer-review process in order to ensure the scientific quality of the two different types of contributions. The idea is that the texts should be assessed on their own terms. Johansson's criticism is that the review template for essays is too strict in its approach to architectural research, while he wants to restore the academic essay as a genre in architecture. This is, of course, an important debate.

Here is one background to Johansson's debate article. The different templates for scientific articles and academic essays were first published in issue 2-2019 after being discussed and commented on by the editorial team and board of the *Nordic Association of Architectural Research*. The review templates were subsequently posted on the website. The background was the experience of different publishing traditions in the Nordic countries, differences in types of argumentation and verification, writing styles, and a varying use of concepts in architectural research. The point is that peer-reviewed articles and essays have the same scientific standard and quality in this academic context. They just represent different research traditions of knowledge production. The editorial comment in issue 2-2019 views architecture as a very broad research subject, spanning the range between, for instance, artistic, humanistic, historical, technological research, and physical planning. However, it is possible to see a clarifying pattern in this mix of academic traditions.

Academic essays are typically used for presenting and discussing research in the humanities, architectural history, aesthetics, and design. These sub-subjects can be found at universities. Articles, on the other hand, are the norm for communicating research in the social sciences and technology, and can typically be about building design, urban planning, and landscape architecture. These contributions are usually part of a technological tradition. This division of architecture into art and science is especially confusing in the Nordic countries. Behind the Nordic schools of architecture are two very different principles for communicating research based on whether they are located in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, or Finland. In Denmark and Norway, the schools of architecture are embedded in universities and their humanistic tradition. In Sweden and Finland, by contrast, the schools of architecture were established at institutions of technology. In both cases, the schools of architecture are trying to bridge the gap between artistic sensibility and demands for scientific methodology in education and research. In order to handle manuscripts – essays and articles – on equal terms based on their respective research tradition, the journal applies two different templates for peer reviewing. This is meant to align the review questions with the type of text submitted, while maintaining the same quality expectations vis-à-vis the peer review process across all submissions.