

We, the jury for the 2024 edition of the Czech Architecture Award, are seven architects with practices based in Switzerland, Austria, Italy, England, Slovakia, Lithuania, and Greece. We travelled around the Czech Republic, visiting the projects that had been nominated for the Czech Architecture Award, from September 3rd to September 7th, 2024. We travelled together, on a bus, from project to project, and had the privilege of experiencing firsthand an incredible array of architecture and public spaces.

At each stop of our road trip, we met with the architects to discuss their work, their process, and the broader context in which they had created their concepts. In many cases, we also had conversations with the clients that had commissioned the projects and/or the public servants that were instrumental in their implementation and operation. Between stops, we engaged in stimulating conversations that gave us the opportunity to agree on a set of criteria for the evaluation process. We would like to take this opportunity to describe our criteria in order to provide insight into the choices we have made:

Diversity

From the very beginning, we agreed that we would celebrate the pluralism of architectural production in the Czech Republic. We would not favour any ideological tendency, demographic group, building typology or design methodology. On the contrary, we would honour the full spectrum of creativity, identifying outliers that had something important to reveal.

Sustainability

The international architectural community is urgently redefining itself to address the climate emergency. As a main contributor to CO2 emissions (approx. 40%) and energy consumption (approx. 40%), the built environment is one of the main culprits in the rapid degradation of our natural environment. As architects, we need to change our education, our methods, and our mentality very quickly. Acknowledging humanity's current predicament, we were eager to identify projects that were designed and implemented with environmental sensitivity, and we were hoping to discover projects that proposed environmental innovations from which we could all learn.

Reusing

At a time when many industrial-era buildings have been left vacant, the topic of reusing and activating existing structures has become important and should be prioritised over demolition and new construction. Revitalisation allows us to experience the power of history and the stories of protagonists dating from prior uses. In the Czech Republic, we encountered many inspiring examples that must be shown internationally as an inspiration to owners and architects.

Empowerment and Social Sustainability

In the postmodernist era, architects are becoming less influential in the important decisions that are shaping the world in which we live. Architecture is underestimated by decisionmakers, the people with political and financial power. Architects are relegated to the roles of 'beautifiers'; they are becoming superficial contributors to decisions that have already been taken. To contribute to the reversal of this tendency, we wanted to highlight projects that prove that architecture has the potential to nurture significant social impact, creating spaces, circumstances, and relationships that enhance human coexistence in cities and in the countryside.

Craftsmanship

Buildings and spaces are constructed through processes of collaboration. In these processes, architecture depends on good craftsmanship to create multiple layers of aesthetic inspiration. We were looking for projects that celebrated the art of making, projects where architects have nurtured processes of collaboration with inspired craftsmen.

Inspiration and Emotion

We all experience built architectural work through our senses. Exceptional architecture has an intangible ability to stimulate our senses and excite our souls. As with any art form, the visceral appreciation of architecture is a subjective matter. At each stop of our journey, we hoped to encounter an extraordinary project that would touch us emotionally, inspiring our collective subjectivity.

For nine consecutive years, the Czech Chamber of Architects has invited awardwinning architects from all over the world to serve as jurors. The international composition of the jury has connotations and consequences that we would like to acknowledge and elaborate on.

As 'outsiders', we are aware of our shortcomings. We know that we have had limited friction with the cultural, political, and economical context in which architecture is produced in the Czech Republic, so please excuse us for missing nuances that local jurors would have identified. However, on the flip side of the coin, our perspective gave us the opportunity to understand the projects we visited through a transnational prism, informed by the architectural practices of all the places where we work and in comparison with contemporary architectural production in many countries. We would like to highlight three broader observations about the 31 buildings shortlisted for the Czech Architecture Award that resulted from our transnational comparisons, with the hope that they will provoke further discussion and debate:

The most alarming observation that we made about most of the projects we visited, was that they were environmentally indifferent. Too many designs did not prioritise controlling the carbon footprint of the built environment. This is in complete contrast with current international practices where architects are investing their creativity in designing innovative proposals to produce and store energy, minimise the consumption of carbonhungry materials, invent ingenious approaches to passive heating and cooling, explore façades that enhance natural lighting conditions, control and reuse rainwater, and are holistically conscious of the overall environmental consequences of their work. The floods that resulted from storm Boris, one week after our visit, are a devastating reminder of the urgency with which we must confront this universal problem, step by step, one building at a time.

Around the world, architects need to be stoic. We need to accept that architecture takes years to be implemented. However, judging from the projectswe visited, architects must endure abnormally long processes to complete their work in the Czech Republic. At each stop of our road trip, we asked the architects to describe the timeframe of their project: how long it took to design, get the building permissions and construct their work. The most common answer was 8 to 10 years. This is more than double the amount of time we are accustomed to in the countries where we practise. Architectural ideas are bound to become outdated with the passage of so much time. The integrity of architectural propositions is bound to be compromised when it is subjected to such lengthy processes of

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negotiation. Professional practices are bound to become insolvent if they are dependent on such inefficient processes. These lengthy processes also make the projects unnecessarily expensive, which is particularly significant for housing.

We were impressed by the quantity and the high quality of projects that proposed new designs for existing buildings. These included refurbishments, historical preservations, and additions to existing buildings. From the list of 307 total entries that were submitted for the competition, 42% of them (130) were interventions in existing buildings. A disproportionate number of these entries made it into the shortlist of projects we visited during our trip (15 out of 31 projects), while four out of the five finalists, including the winner of the award, were architectural propositions for existing buildings.

We have met so many interesting, creative people who shared their experiences, their talents, and their knowledge with such generosity. We are also grateful to have gained such a densely packed insight into the current state of Czech architecture and to have participated in an interactive process that would have made any social anthropologist envious.

In closing, we would like to thank Mr. Jan Kasl and the Czech Chamber of Architects for inviting us to be part of such a rich experience. In particular, we would also like to thank Barbora Veselá, Marek Job, Barbora Sedlářová and Ondrej Besperat who made sure that our road trip was wellorganised, welldocumented, and wellcommunicated with such good humour, dedication, and personal commitment.