

Jury Report

With 241 submissions, a substantially larger number than last year, the members of the jury of the 2023 Czech Architecture award were delighted to see the growing success of the scheme. Its primary objective is to communicate to the wider public the importance of achieving architecture of quality in every kind of setting, and with so many projects to consider, the award is clearly reaching many communities. The judging process took us across the Czech Republic, from remote rural enclaves, to historic towns, from former industrial centres looking for a new future, to the monumental heart of Prague. As visitors to the country – jury members came from across Europe – we were made well aware of a long architectural tradition and the work of a new generation of architects. Given that its main objective is communication, this award should be understood as a conversation about what contemporary architecture has to offer the country, rather than a competition. It was a chance for the jury to explore ideas about how best to recycle buildings that have lost their original use and how architects can address the issue of climate change. We considered the ways in which small interventions can help sustain communities, and how contemporary architecture can respond to historic contexts. It is this discussion and the lessons that the shortlist offers that count, rather than the impossible comparison between a bridge and nursery school, or between a civic centre and a contemporary art gallery. Among the projects that we went to see, we found ways to understand how humility and simplicity can create a powerful memorial to past tragedy. They reminded us of the part that architecture can play in bringing a community together both physically and socially.

Each of the works that we considered made its own contribution to the architectural conversation.

We met the architects and the engineers responsible, and in some cases, also the people who had actually built the projects with their own hands. We met clients and members of communities – the individuals on whom architecture of quality really depends.

We were moved by many of the projects; the patient work of a community of residents in a Prague housing project from the era of Czechoslovakia who came together to upgrade all their homes, and a memorial to three generations of resistance. The jury in the end agreed to give the award this year to a footbridge in Litomyšl. It addressed so many of the issues that face contemporary architecture, but retained an essential simplicity. It is a synthesis of architecture, engineering and urbanism, the product of a community that over many years has made architecture a significant part of its public life, the subject of a shared civic vision for the future. The bridge combines a concrete tower with a steel Vierendeel structure, which act as large-scale sculptural objects, in conversation with one other. The structural requirement to counterbalance the main span of the bridge results in a perfectly located lookout spot, suspended over Loučna's riverbanks. A few careful details have been added, such as the sky window in the elevator tower and the calligraphic swirls on the doors. At the same time it makes a vital connection between two physically divided parts of a town, and offers an impressive

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example of a creative collaboration between an architect, an engineer, an artist and a community.