

JURY REPORT

For this 7th edition of the Czech Architecture Award, the jury had the difficult task of evaluating more than 200 projects submitted. The projects submitted were diverse in scale, program, and process of implementation, and can be considered as a representative cut through the contemporary practice of architecture in the Czech Republic.

The first phase of the selection process was held through online meetings soon after the jurors got acquainted with the different projects. The documentation submitted was mostly extensive and offered the possibility to evaluate each project thoroughly, taking the necessary time and attention. In this first phase, each juror was asked to compile a list of thirty preferred projects. Consequently, the discussion focused on the projects that were selected by at least half of the jury, for their spatial and social qualities.

However, strong attention was also given to single projects proposing relevant approaches confronting contemporary challenges and social expectations, even if they were not on the list of the most voted. The jury feared that more experimental or marginal projects could remain unnoticed. The meetings, thus, were an opportunity to explore the most interesting fields of design research represented by the whole panorama of current architectural practice: environmental and social sustainability, public space construction, the relation between architecture and landscape, the use of traditional and low-tech materials as well as innovation in architecture production, urban densification, the specific tradition of modern architecture in the Czech Republic and finally the reinterpretation of housing tradition, both in the urban and rural context. In the final discussion, the jury arrived at a shared conclusion for the first selection, finally nominating 29 projects.

In the second phase, the process went on with meetings in the Czech Republic. The journey covered the whole territory of the Czech Republic, and jurors travelled more than 1300 km, to have direct knowledge of the selected projects and meet the architects and their clients. Site visits were of enormous importance, as no photograph or drawing can compare with the direct experience of architecture. Visits were frequently the opportunity to have a better knowledge of the context, and a better understanding of the opportunities and constraints that are part of the implementation process of every project. Architects, users, and clients proved to be important players during the visits and onsite discussions, answering questions and having the opportunity to express their points of view on the contemporary practice of architecture.

Finally, a shortlist had to be compiled. It is probably relevant, at this point, to understand the meaning of a prize assigned by a jury composed of architects on behalf of the Chambers of architects. It is a special moment of reflection about architecture itself, its role and its responsibilities confronting society. Projects which are chosen to be finalists acquire the status of models and good practices in architecture. The jury discussed this point extensively: finalist projects should fulfil a general prerequisite of excellence in the quality of the space produced, but they should also evidence their relevance in addressing contemporary challenges in the social and environmental realm. Each of the projects selected in this final stage, thus, signals a specific domain where architecture can express its potential in supporting and guiding the development of society. Architecture, in this context, is considered an extended domain including urban regeneration, landscape architecture as well as interior design.

Looking at all the projects submitted for the prize we can observe how the core of architectural discourse is firmly occupied by private housing and public buildings. The architectural theme of the single-family house was probably over-represented among the 200 projects submitted.

However, the jury focused on a specific perspective in both issues of housing and public buildings. Projects promoted and realized in the context of small rural villages, trying to offer a livable alternative environment to the most urbanized areas in the country, captured the jury's

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attention. This is the case of the winning project - the Kozina house - that can be considered as an implicit manifesto, underling the rich potential of a specific attention to the urban-rural relationship and to the rehabilitation of the existing built environment. Reviving public life in small cities and rural villages and understanding new forms of urban density, is also at the centre of the finalist project for a small library and activity centre in Vratislavice, while is also relevant in the mentioned project for a sports hall in Nový Hrozenkov.

The relationship between landscape design and the support to tourism economies in rural countryside is crucial in the project of the Guard Patrol where architects were able to answer the demand of the public administration with a critical and poetic approach.

Finally, the jury selected two different preservation projects of 20th century modern architecture. The first, the renovation of the Electricity Building in Prague, underlines the challenge and the effort to interpret the tradition of Modern Architecture, protecting and creating new programmatic opportunities for an excellent existing architecture, which otherwise would run the risk of demolition or abandonment. In the second situation – the Pavilion Z – a simple and utilitarian pavilion, becomes the starting point of a larger urban transformation in the city of České Budějovice. The new renewed pavilion interprets this role providing a flexible space easy to fill with a large variety of events.

Finally, the jury a wonderful experience, having a simultaneous view of the architectural production of a whole country and sharing the responsibility to evaluate projects and state priorities. We would therefore like to thank the organizers for this opportunity, as well as for the trust they placed in us and for the splendid welcome and organization.