

This is the fourth year of the Czech Architecture Awards, introduced by the Chamber of Architects. Over 186 realized projects from nearly every region of the Czech Republic were submitted. Their programs range from private houses to offices, public buildings, educational institutions and cultural use.

An international jury panel has been elected with architects and design theorists coming from Hungary, France, Great Britain, Israel, Switzerland and Germany to assess the state of Czech architecture in a national and international context.

In the course of the first round of selection the jury elaborated a list of 34 nominees. These projects have been all visited during a trip across the country. The jury viewed the sites and spoke to the users, clients and architects. This approach has proved to be very useful, as it has enabled us to gather a great deal of multi-layered knowledge about the individual projects.

Czechoslovakia was formed after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the first world war. Later it became part of the Eastern Bloc of nations under Soviet influence. The country split peacefully into the Czech Republic and Slovakia following the Velvet Revolution of 1989. This movement had a pan-European significance due to its link with the continued fall of the iron curtain. Almost exactly thirty years later our international jury board travels through the Czech Republic, situated in the heart of central Europe, with the task of finding the winning project for the Czech Architecture Prize 2019.

Architecture is a reflection of cultural environments. It integrates the legislative aspects within a society, the program of a society and a multitude of cultural values. These values are

united within a physical space. Understood in this sense, architecture is an overall physical archive of a society at a certain time. You can read the history of a country like the Czech Republic in its architecture: Art Nouveau, Cubism, Functionalism, Social Realism, Post-Velvet Revolution creations - all these styles are deeply tied to their historical context.

To be sure, new architecture has to face many challenges. By striving to be unique, not every attempt can succeed. Greed for profit threatens to do worse than dictatorships did. Whether or not new trends in architecture will be able to meet these challenges is yet to be seen. The authentic character of 21st century Czech architecture has yet to be determined.

During communism, new rules for the creation of architecture were enforced. No more exuberant, imperialistic and religious styles were used. Also, Functionalism at the beginning was considered to be a too Western approach. Instead, Czechoslovakia adopted the Socialist realism and Stalinist classicism of the USSR, which were later replaced by the Socialist Modernism. The latter mainly became visible by a large number of prefabricated panel housing estates. After the Velvet Revolution that brought democracy to Czechoslovakia during 1989, innovative architectural designs were resuscitated after 40 years of communist rule.

This period brought new possibilities, new challenges, new forms of expression. No longer was the country subject to artistic limitations or the restrictions of a construction system, but instead the architects were suddenly able to experiment with all kinds of architecture. To what extent the country has been able to fulfill its dream of freedom and democracy? Where have new points of

reference been found and how has the architectural heritage been dealt with?

We were surprised to see so many projects that had come about through the individual commitment of private initiators. People whose architectural values meet a holistic standard that also takes social and ecological issues seriously. An approach that is reflected at all levels of society. We visited buildings that were constructed with almost nothing, as well as more expensive ones that deliberately kept their standard of execution simple.

The architects choose to design skillful buildings that are more of a backdrop for the user than an ambitious piece of design work on its own. New buildings began to revert back to the more basic, purpose-driven designs that first defined functionalism. I think this is one of the most interesting aspects of Czech architecture at the moment, beyond the question of architectural involvement in the technological development of our time.

Not through representation but through the production of repercussions on togetherness such architecture can have an impact on social processes and can give people the opportunity to treat the world, in which they live together, responsibly and carefully. What if every given answer was driven by a new consciousness, that aims at sustainability and humanity? Architecture, when at its most daring and imaginative in its capacity to respond and be responsible, can act as such a resonance chamber.

Jury Statement