

Preface

Farrokh Derakhshani

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture focuses on processes of change in parts of the world where the built environment is undergoing rapid transformation, at times with dire consequences. Over the past four decades the Award has sought to understand the nature of this change and to have an impact on design and building in the hope of creating a better quality of life for the people who inhabit these environments. To this end, it recognises exemplary projects and shares the lessons they offer with all those who play a role in this endeavour – architects, planners, government agencies, clients and, above all, the final users of the buildings. Each three-year cycle of the Award involves an exhaustive search for innovative solutions and positive achievements which highlight the significant contribution that architecture can make towards shaping and improving our lives.

From the outset the Award has made both the architectural profession and the wider public aware of a broad new approach to what constitutes architecture. The 15 projects selected in the very first 1977–80 cycle engaged with a wide range of issues, from conservation to slum upgrading, and embraced traditional as well as new designs. Works by both emerging architectural talents and established practices were celebrated alongside the efforts of clients and builders. Together, these projects spoke of the plurality of societies in countries where Muslims have a significant presence, from Indonesia to Morocco.

This pluralistic approach has been pursued by successive independent Master Juries, responding to diverse concerns identified by a rotating Steering Committee for each triennial Award Cycle. The Chairman of the Steering Committee is His Highness the Aga Khan, who established the Award in 1977 to recognise architecture's primary role in improving the quality of life in fast-changing Muslim societies.

One of the most pressing aspects of such change is the movement of peoples far from their homelands. Sometimes forced, sometimes voluntary, this mass migration – from rural to urban areas, or from one country or continent to another – has given traditionally mono-cultural societies a new character shaped by multilayered identities. But it has also posed challenges. How do you create a sense of cohesion in a disparate population? How do you draw new communities into the public sphere, facilitate their engagement with civil society? The Aga Khan Award for Architecture confronts such issues head on, showcasing projects of excellence that address the aspirations of these communities.

The aim of this publication is to share the findings of the 13th Award Cycle, spanning from 2014 to 2016. Among hundreds of nominations the Master Jury reviewed 348 projects from 69 countries and shortlisted 19 of these for in-depth inspection and expert review. From this shortlist six projects were then selected to share the prize money of 1,000,000 USD. Both the Award recipients and the shortlisted projects propose creative solutions to some of the most relevant issues facing architecture today. While differing in scale and approach, all the projects are part of their contexts and enhance the sense of belonging in their communities. Mohsen Mostafavi sets the tone of this cycle in his introductory piece emphasising architecture, place and plurality, while texts by members of the Master Jury, Steering Committee and on-site review teams eloquently elaborate on key aspects of the projects and the issues raised during their deliberations.

What emerges from the many nominations received, and most notably from the 19 projects featured in this publication, is a sense of what can be achieved when architects and clients work collaboratively, combining their forces in a conscious effort to improve the built environment and the everyday lives of people.