



# Steering Committee Brief

For almost 40 years, the Aga Khan Award for Architecture has worked on expanding the horizons of the practice of architecture throughout Muslim societies to address a variety of challenges. In doing so, the Award has promoted successful interventions in the built environment that have contributed to social and economic development and to empowering communities. In all instances, the Award has adhered to the highest standards of architectural practice, while recognising diverse innovative approaches that challenge and expand conventional boundaries, whether technical, professional or conceptual.

The Award has an open and inclusive perspective that engages with projects contributing to transforming the quality of life for Muslim communities in various settings, whether rural or urban, national or diasporic. The Muslim *Umma* is diverse and pluralistic in its values and aspirations. In a world where cultural expressions are increasingly challenged by globalising commercial, political and social forces on the one hand, and by rising trends that promote national and religious exclusivity on the other, Muslim communities worldwide need to engage in a continuous re-examination of issues relating to identity. The Award aims to help identify positive modes that enable established Muslim communities to take on the challenges of globalisation; to empower emerging Muslim communities to positively negotiate their role within the multicultural contexts of their host countries; and to extend the outreach of Muslim cultures into the world at large by promoting understanding and openness.

We also need to keep in mind that parts of the Islamic world are suffering high levels of political instability and violence that often are related to contested conceptions of the social and cultural roles of Islam. This instability and violence has often spilled over to affect areas outside the traditional boundaries of the Islamic world. These conditions make it ever more pressing to emphasise agencies of openness, pluralism and tolerance within Muslim communities. This is a role that the Award has taken on since its inception, and that role is more relevant and pressing than ever.

The Award should continue to address ongoing economic and social transformations in the Islamic world as that world becomes more heavily engaged in transnational production and consumption networks. The impact of this development on local communities has been enormous, with social changes often lagging behind economic development. In the review process, issues of equity, sustainability, political participation and good governance therefore should be considered as they are at the root of developments affecting the built environment.

The Award has also strived to extend its explorations to new frontiers. It has acknowledged buildings that address environmental and climatic challenges, has engaged with issues affecting the urban scale, and has acknowledged the role of various agents in forming the built environment. These agents include not only architects, planners and other related professionals, but also a wide diversity of clients and other stakeholders such as governmental bodies, civil society institutions and local communities. New approaches for addressing the challenges of urbanism have also been explored, ranging from the use of reforestation at the edges of growing cities, to initiatives in urban planning and preservation that develop confidence and trust between conflicting stakeholders. The Master Jury is encouraged to explore still new frontiers for interventions in the built environment.

Moreover, Muslim communities throughout the world are facing mounting challenges relating to the quality of their built environments, which makes the continuous re-examination and redefinition of the issues that the Award emphasises an ongoing priority. Environmental and ecological concerns are becoming increasingly critical as levels of air, water and soil pollution grow, and also as challenges resulting from climate change and scarcity of water resources reach grave proportions. Many urban centres are undergoing serious and continuous deterioration as a result of the mounting pressures of rapidly increasing populations and crumbling infrastructures. This is evident in a multiplicity of urban problems including overcrowding, sprawl and overwhelming levels of traffic congestion. There is a need to identify and acknowledge tools that have successfully enhanced the resilience of the built environment, allowing it to face such challenges.

The Award therefore needs to continue to identify innovative interventions that incorporate new technological and social mechanisms while also recognising responses that fall within traditional realms of architecture. In doing so, the Award acknowledges the importance of developing contextual, integrated and multidisciplinary solutions that contribute to elevating people's well-being and quality of life. These include master planning and other tools for managing urban development, public transportation solutions, the creation and development of various types of public spaces, and infrastructure initiatives serving every scale from small local communities to metropolitan urban populations – all are a high priority for the Award. Industrial sites and places of work also are to be carefully considered with a view to providing architectural excellence as well as securing safe, comfortable and pleasant environments for their users. Another important issue is the long-standing neglect of rural societies, where architectural and planning solutions can greatly contribute to alleviating

conditions of distress. While it is unlikely that any individual project can deal with all of the issues we have proposed for your consideration, we hope that the projects identified for premiation by the Master Jury will take a thoughtful and coherent approach, on both the individual and collective levels, to addressing at least some of the threshold criteria identified above.

In conclusion, the Steering Committee recommends that the Master Jury give consideration to projects responding to the following concerns:

- How projects may address the challenges of globalisation, with particular reference to economic and social changes, urbanisation, migrations and diasporas;
- How the principles of pluralism and mutual respect may be embraced and reflected in architectural design;
- How new technological and environmental challenges may be addressed through infrastructures and innovative approaches;
- How the historical environment may be protected, restored and valued for relevant uses and needs;
- How projects may help communities to respond to crises, disasters and conflicts.

The Steering Committee would like to encourage the Master Jury to recognise projects that take risks by placing themselves at the edge of current practice, anticipating trends and responding to unpredictable challenges.

Finally, the Steering Committee recommends that due attention be given to excellence in design, quality of construction and project implementation, at the scale of architecture, landscape, urbanism, private and public space, as well as the appropriate use of human and material resources.