CULTIVATING ARCHITECTURE

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When the Aga Khan Award for Architecture was established in 1977, a set of values that was neither praised, promoted nor respected by prevailing architectural practice was introduced to the wider agenda of architecture in both the urban and rural built environments. It would be incorrect to say that it was exclusively due to the Award that cultural aspects of architecture became a focus in the post-1978 period. However, the new priorities supported by the Award have become the major conceptual tools of the architectural profession.

At the end of the 1970s, when very few were concerned about the 'participation' of people in the formation of their own environment, Hassan Fathy was honoured with the Chairman’s Award for his lifelong and dedicated work, based on the participation of local people in building. The technologies and know-how that people inherit as their tradition were cherished, and their methods of construction were put to use through direct participation. Simultaneously, in its first cycle, the Award found the improvement of de facto settlements in Indonesia praiseworthy. This contribution to architectural discourse by the most coveted award to date took the whole profession by surprise. The seeds of ‘democratization of the environment’ were sown through the Award’s serious and meticulous process of selection—a process that discovered, validated and encouraged participation. The following decade saw many eminent thinkers profess that architecture had to become an art that allowed for people’s participation in the formation of their futures. The agenda of the architectural media and many development-oriented international agencies began to acknowledge and support ‘sustainability’ as a guiding principle, defining it in economic, social, environmental and cultural terms. Enriched with many supplementary qualities, this concept substantially enlarged the scope of building activity, especially in the developing world. Accordingly, during subsequent cycles of the Award, sustainability remained an important concern of the juries and became a basic criterion of judgment when validating architectural accomplishments.

This intellectual fabric, woven with ideas that generated awareness and encouraged people’s appropriation of their own environments, introduced the new, important concept of ‘partnership’. People invested their own human and economic resources, and saw the direct social benefits of their work.

These concepts became the values of a global society concerned with the polar differences between the economically developed and underdeveloped worlds. The new institutions and communication instruments that emerged at the end of the twentieth century established a forum where the problems of each world could be shared by the other. Poverty, along with lack of provision for education and health, became the main concern of the entire planet. Issues such as the protection of human rights, freedom of expression and democratization suddenly took precedence over even politics. In addition, serious environmental problems that could no longer be denied or overlooked required the attention of all, regardless of geography or culture.

In Award seminars, Steering Committee meetings and Master Jury deliberations these widely accepted humanitarian and ethical values have been developed, redefined and propagated within the context of architecture. The industrial and electronic revolutions of the twentieth century bequeathed a legacy of priorities and values that must be administered very wisely today, on the threshold of what will surely be an exciting and productive adventure during the next hundred years. The well-being of mankind and care for the environment have become our top priorities, in great contrast to the immediate past’s focus on economic development which, left unchecked, caused damage that may prove irremediable. The equitable distribution of resources to all people is now the most important issue not only architecturally but also, most especially, in terms of human beings caring for each other and their environments.

The widened scope of architecture, reinforced with lessons learnt and noble intentions, has put the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in a unique position to recognize, promote and reward accomplishments. Dedication and the pursuit of continuity have moulded the unique nature of the Aga Khan Award as a ‘space for freedom’ in search of an ‘architecture beyond architecture’. The eight cycles completed over twenty-four years of activity constitute a definition of ‘architecture’ within the wider context of the built environment, and have consistently promoted nearly all aspects of architecture in Islamic societies today. One of the
Award Juries' key considerations remains the future of our architectural heritage. Every jury has tackled this important issue, giving prime consideration to protection and restoration. The main problems addressed in this realm have been the quality of research and the scientific bases and approaches used. All the projects that have received Awards for work in this area have the important component of reviving and developing old building techniques, almost extinct crafts and technical aptitudes.

Ali Qapu, Chehel Sutun and Hasht Behesht, Isfahan, Iran, 1980
Tomb of Shah Rukn-i-‘Alam, Multan, Pakistan, 1983
Al-Aqsa Mosque, al-Haram al-Sharif, Jerusalem, 1986
Great Omari Mosque, Sidon, Lebanon, 1989

When the original function of such buildings loses relevance, this should never result in their demolition - even if such destruction could yield great, albeit short-term, economic benefit. Adaptive reuse has been an obvious way to revive our architectural heritage by providing a new existence appropriate to the realities of our time and contemporary conditions. The present Award cycle brings us an entirely new approach, however, with New Life for Old Structures in various locations in Iran. This series of centrally monitored interventions has revived dilapidated and vacant buildings by recycling them for educational and cultural purposes.

The date given for each project indicates the year it received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

Rüstem Paşa Caravanserai, Edirne, Turkey, 1980
Historic Sites Development, 1986
Ertegün House, Bodrum, Turkey, 1980
Azem Palace, Damascus, Syria, 1983
Especially during the period following World War II, fast-growing cities exerted enormous pressure on the historical fabric of their old towns by adopting cheap and inferior construction techniques, with little concern for urban planning and development. Subsequently, new, transient and underprivileged groups moved to these areas. Traditionally, such populations had a lesser sense of a 'history of place' in urban areas, and fewer economic means to cope with the deterioration of the historical heritage. At the same time, many of the international agencies whose mandate was to conserve the historical heritage were primarily preoccupied with monuments; they did not pay particular attention to the urban fabric of old towns until as late as the 1970s. The Award was among the first institutions to recognize contributions towards the safe-keeping and development of this legacy.

In many cities historical housing exists alongside monuments, forming a rich and varied urban fabric, but one that is fragile. Revitalization requires not only architectural restoration but also social and economic infrastructure to ensure community survival and vitality. The Award has successfully identified many examples of such initiatives that have, in turn, engendered and inspired similar efforts in Islamic and non-Islamic communities worldwide.

Conservation of Sidi Bou Said, Tunis, Tunisia, 1980
Rehabilitation of Asilah, Morocco, 1989

Conservation of Old Sana'a, Yemen, 1995
Conservation of Mostar Old Town, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1986
Reconstruction of Hafsa Quarter II, Tunis, Tunisia, 1995
Darb Qirimiz Quarter, Cairo, Egypt, 1983
Restoration of Bukhara Old City, Uzbekistan, 1995
Rehabilitation of Hebron Old Town, Hebron, 1998
Kairouan Conservation Programme, Tunisia, 1992
In almost every city in the Muslim world the rapid sprawl of thoughtless and unplanned housing through the urban tissue following the 1950s instilled feelings of surprise and helplessness in architects and decision-makers alike. Spontaneous housing types were attributed popular local names such as 'basti' in the Indian subcontinent, 'kampungs' in Indonesia, 'bidonvilles' in North Africa, 'informal buildings' in Egypt, 'gecekondu' in Turkey and 'refugee camps' in the instance of displaced populations. Architectural theory, practice and education not only disapproved of this form of building activity but also entirely excluded and ignored it. In fact, when the Aga Khan Award embraced and recognized such settlements as essential components of contemporary society, there was initially a public outcry. The Award’s pioneering decisions later met with esteem.

Housing has always been a central concern of the Award. In the best examples, families and individuals are embraced by architecture in its most personal sense. Award Juries have explored this subject in many meetings, paying special attention to efforts directed at lower-income groups, be they public or private initiatives. Not enough successful projects have been recognized thus far, but there have been several important accomplishments.

Slum Networking of Indore City, Indore, India, 1998
Kampung Kebalen Improvement, Surabaya, Indonesia, 1986
Kampung Improvement Programme, Jakarta, Indonesia, 1980
Kampung Kali Cho-de, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 1992
Pondok Pesantron Pabelan, Central Jaya, Indonesia, 1980
Ismaïliyya Development Projects, Ismaïliyya, Egypt, 1986
East Wahdat Upgrading Programme, Amman, Jordan, 1992
Khuda-ki-Basti Incremental Development Scheme, Hyderabad, Pakistan, 1995

Courtyard Houses, Agadir, Morocco, 1980
Shushtar New Town, Shushtar, Iran, 1986
Dar Lamane Housing Community, Casablanca, Morocco, 1986
Hafsia Quarter, Tunis, Tunisia, 1983
Aranya Community Housing, Indore, India, 1995
Rural housing projects identified by the Award have been characterized by ingenious credit mechanisms and simple construction techniques. However, rural development and the architecture appropriate to it have not figured amongst winning projects in the past. For the first time this cycle features rural development alongside rural housing as a priority concern. Three such projects are recognized; each displays an individual approach but, collectively, they stress the undeniable importance of rural life and development. It is within this context that the majority of Muslims lives and works. Aït Iktel, a remote Moroccan village near Abadou, exemplifies an approach that merges development and environmental conservation. In the Tilonia region in India, the Barefoot Architects have developed a humble but meaningful architectural language, while improving living conditions through water harvesting – a programme that provides more time for the education of the rural population, particularly girls and young women. The Kahere Ella Poultry Farming School in Koliagbe, Guinea, displays simple and elegant architectural articulation but also plays an important social role, since its end objective is to increase protein in the diets of Guineans and reduce malnutrition in rural areas.

Mosque architecture has been viewed at many complex levels, and different approaches, reflecting the spirit of Islam and its temporal and geographic plurality have been identified through the Award. The juries have selected a wide range of solutions and architectural expressions, including those that continue vernacular traditions, those that express popular tastes, those that offer classical reinterpretations and those that represent modern creativity.

Great Mosque of Nïnïn, Mali, 1983
Sherefudin’s White Mosque, Visoko, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1983
Yaama Mosque, Yaama, Tahoua, Niger, 1986
Bhong Mosque, Bhong, Rahim-Yar Khan, Pakistan, 1986
Saïd Naum Mosque, Jakarta, Indonesia, 1986
Corniche Mosque, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 1989
Mosque of the Grand National Assembly, Ankara, Turkey, 1995
Great Mosque of Riyadh and Redevelopment of the Old City Centre, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1995
A commitment to ensuring the continuing relevance of building traditions has not been limited to historical buildings and urban fabric. The Award has also encouraged vernacular building types and technologies that have been developed and transferred from one generation to the next. The most striking example of this type of architecture is the work of the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy, who received the Chairman's Award in 1980. Since then, most of the juries have continued to identify important facets of vernacular building traditions.

A continuum within the Award has been the great attention paid to the design and building of projects that respond to their historical, natural and cultural contexts. Many such buildings represent contextualism in architecture, and have provided significant stimuli for architects and others. The Iraqi architect Rifat Chadirji, a pioneer in the realm of contextualism, received the second Chairman's Award in 1986. In the present cycle, 2001, a Chairman's Award is bestowed upon the Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, an influential proponent of an architecture that is environmentally in harmony with tropical contexts. His great talent in creating an architectural language that is fully integrated with its site and place, has been an inspiration to the whole profession in the tropics. Continuing in this tradition is another of this cycle's Award recipients, the Datai Hotel in Pulau Langkawi, Malaysia, designed by the eminent Australian architect Kerry Hill – a project that carries Mr Bawa's message to new levels of excellence. In a similar vein, two well-known architects, Jafar Tukan of Jordan and Cengiz Bektas of Turkey, have demonstrated commitment to contextual architecture in different areas of the Muslim world. The SOS Children's Village in Aqaba, designed by Mr Tukan, and the Olbia Social Centre at Akdeniz Universitesi in Antalya, reveal the valour of simplicity, humility and a sensitive understanding of the wider environment. Their work also introduces two new building typologies to this category of winning projects.
The development of creative techniques, building systems and usage of materials has generated novel architectural expressions. The Award has identified and praised structural innovation and appropriate use of materials, as demonstrated by projects both minor and major in scale.

Résidence Andalous, Sousse, Tunisia, 1983
Sidi el-Aloui Primary School, Tunis, Tunisia, 1989
Tanjong Jara Beach Hotel and Rantau Abang Visitors’ Centre, Kuala Trengganu, Malaysia, 1983
Alliance Franco-Sénégalaise, Kaolack, Senegal, 1995
Panafrican Institute for Development, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 1992
Lepers Hospital, Chopda Taluka, India, 1998
Salinger Residence, Selangor, Malaysia, 1998
Mughal Sheraton Hotel, Agra, India, 1980

Kaedi Regional Hospital, Kaedi, Mauritania, 1995
Hajj Terminal, King Abdul Aziz International Airport, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 1983
Stone Building System, Dar’a Province, Syria, 1992
Agricultural Training Centre, Nianing, Senegal, 1980
The Award has also recognized the important works of great architects whose creativity, talent and values have set the finest examples. Architects such as Frei Otto, Henning Larsen, Louis I Kahn, Jean Nouvel, Ken Yeang, Omrania, Nayyar Ali Dada and Charles Correa have all been praised. They were able to build in natural and urban environments, whilst enhancing social and cultural values. Their large-scale buildings, approached with modesty and a keen understanding of culture and history, have yielded novel architectural expressions that have been acclaimed locally and internationally.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1989
Intercontinental Hotel and Conference Centre, Mecca, Saudi Arabia, 1980
Water Towers, Kuwait City, Kuwait, 1980
Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India, Ahmedabad, India, 1992
Menara Mesiniaga, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1995
National Assembly Building, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1989
Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France, 1989
Tuwaiq Palace, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1998
Alhambra Arts Council, Lahore, Pakistan, 1998
Vidhan Bhavan, Bhopal, India, 1998
This cycle, the focus on culture and education has been taken up by the Nubian Museum in Aswan, Egypt, which displays the ethnographic and archaeological heritage of the Nubian population displaced by the construction of the High Dam on the Nile. The sensitive architecture of the complex links the past with the present and connects people with their roots by showcasing their lost heritage. It provides interior and exterior spaces for community gatherings and ensures the continuing vitality of Nubian culture.

Landscapes in which tiring urban life interfaces with the soft, soothing effects of nature have been another of the Award’s main concerns. In the past, parks in urban settings and a large reforestation initiative have been commended. In this cycle, an Award has been presented to a large recreational facility – Baghe-e-Ferdowsi in Tehran, Iran – created with a sophisticated use of natural forms and materials. The widely used park offers relief from the urban congestion of Tehran and provides a variety of spaces for social interaction, as well as access to the higher mountain areas.

The Award is now approaching its twenty-fifth anniversary. Thousands of people have contributed talent and intelligence to our endeavour to improve the built environment and, in so doing, to enrich the human condition. In today’s electronic age, people can share not only each other’s hardships and misery, but also their accomplishments and happiness. The responsible and responsive attitude of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture – to promote successful solutions to difficult problems in the built environment – remains as important today as it was a quarter of a century ago. However, there are many building types, problems and regions that have yet to be addressed. Good buildings for health, industry and housing and schemes to repair both natural and man-made disasters are all areas that the Award must pursue with increasing rigour and determination.

Citra Niaga Urban Development, Samarinda, East Kalimantan, Indonesia, 1989
Palace Parks Programme, Istanbul, Turkey, 1992
Cultural Park for Children, Cairo, Egypt, 1992
Hayy Assafarat Landscaping and al-Kindi Plaza, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1989
Reforestation Programme of the Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, 1995
Landscaping Integration of the Soekarno-Hatta Airport, Cengkareng, Indonesia, 1995