

## Hope

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When the historians of the future look back at this time, what will they see? Environmental crisis? Economic recession? Social instability? Political turbulence? Intellectual neurosis? No doubt. As for the consequences? War? Poverty? Terrorism? Pandemics? Rising crime? Ecological disasters? Mass unemployment? Social unrest? Probably.

One can only hope that the same historians will also note the courageous efforts to combat these problems. The five winners of the 2010 Cycle of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture are inspired and inspiring examples of attempts to forge solutions to complex challenges faced not only by the Muslim world but by people everywhere. Though these projects—a wetland, a factory, a school, a historic area of a city and a museum—are dramatically different in their scale and objectives, each offers hope to people who desperately need it.

One of the five is not only a model of ecological infrastructure but addresses the human problems posed by urbanisation, which is accelerating so aggressively that over half of the global population now live in cities for the first time in history, making those cities ever bigger, denser, more crowded, polluted and threatening. The Wadi Hanifa Wetlands has created a pleasant, safe and tranquil public space for the people of Riyadh within easy reach of a city where such places are so scarce that families are forced to picnic on the sidewalks.

Urbanisation is invariably the consequence of industrialisation, which causes another problem: the poor quality of workplaces, particularly factories in developing economies, where many millions of people work in unsavoury, sometimes dangerous conditions. An enlightened exception is the Ipekyol Textile Factory in the Turkish city of Edirne, a clean, congenial workplace where providing decent conditions for the workers is seen as making an important contribution to the increasing efficiency and profitability of the business.

Yet another problem arising from urbanisation is the escalation of rural poverty, particularly in developing countries where many millions of people are fleeing the countryside in search of employment in towns and cities. As rural populations dwindle, local resources such as schools, shops and medical centers are forced to close, prompting yet more people to leave. The Bridge School in the Chinese village of Xiashi has revitalised a declining rural community by literally bridging the creek that has divided it historically to create an engaging place for local children to fulfil their learning potential.

Navigating the new—whether in the form of a public space, a workplace or a school—is one challenge of modern life; dealing with the old can be equally problematic, not least when it evokes a painful period of history. The restoration of the late 19th- and early 20th-century colonial buildings in the Bab B'Har district of Tunis addresses this adroitly. By using architectural restoration to nurture new skills and commercial opportunities, it has regenerated the local economy in an unusually sensitive reading of Tunisia's colonial history.

Equally sensitive is the design of the Madinat al-Zahra Museum near the Spanish city of Cordoba, where the public can appreciate and learn from the excavation of one of the world's most important early Islamic archaeological sites. It has done so by creating a graceful and expressive building, which sits so lightly on the landscape that it acts as a physical symbol of tolerance and empathy. Like the other four projects, it is an architectural expression of hope.