Destroyed City Told
Earthquake memorial and archaeological museum, Agadir, Morocco

Summary and appraisal by the jury

The town of Agadir in Morocco was hit by a devastating earthquake in 1960. The “kasbah” or fortified town on the hill was entirely destroyed and the site abandoned. This dramatic event in the history of the town establishes the very narrative of the submitted project: the creation of a place of contemplation in memory of the 15,000 residents who died in the earthquake. The scheme incorporates a memorial on the site and an archaeological museum retracing the history of the city. The building, for example, integrates the ruins of the fortification wall, establishing a dialog between the old and the new, between the past and the present.

The jury was captivated by the clarity and beauty of the models and drawings featured in the submission. Here, architecture in its purest disciplinary form is brought to the fore to create a magnificent ensemble, one touching the senses and foregrounding aesthetics as a key tenet of sustainable development. The scheme merges tradition with a contemporary understanding of architecture without mimicking the past or succumbing to the pitfalls of orthodox historic reinstatements. The proposed structure tells a story, one told in the present, while recalling a past and pointing to a potential future.

Progress: Rebuilt in the 1960s, Agadir remains the most beautiful example of Moroccan modernism. The concrete was set using wooden forms and its ochre tint has survived. Today we need to revive the techniques and materials underpinning Agadir’s identity.

People: Since the earthquake, the site remains unconstructible, regarded today as a cemetery and a ruin. Agadir has no major museum or place of meditation for families of earthquake victims. The ambition of the Memorial is to create a focus, with the memory of the city and that of the missing people fused together in one edifice. The exterior landscaping offers the inhabitants panoramic views.

Planet: Agadir’s particularity is low thermal amplitude in winter and summer. Temperatures are usually mild due to ocean winds. Thus, the memorial is designed to facilitate air circulation. Many spaces are exterior, arranged to facilitate air circulation and thus reducing spaces that require air conditioning. Sunlight, very abundant here, is recuperated for the building’s low energy needs. During construction, the concrete will be manufactured at a cement factory at only 5km from the site. The factory has its own quarries nearby, enabling the manufacture of the edifice to be entirely local, and thus reducing the energy impact of construction.

Prosperity: The project was designed on a simple scale whose creation will not generate any particular difficulty. The use of local materials (locally-manufactured concrete) lends to it a basis of economy, whose defining elements are Para-seismic foundations. The Memorial will become a touristic attraction and cultural vocation for a town that currently has only a beach to offer the numerous worldwide visitors.

Place: The project is sited on the fortifications of the kasbah. Abandoned since the earthquake and since disfigured by the installation of relay antennas, yet the ancient kasbah that dominated the bay and its ramparts is still visible from numerous city viewpoints. This project seeks to return it to the dignity it deserves and also offer the population a communion location for the historical memory of Agadir. The building integrates the ancient wall, as the sole surviving vestige after the earthquake. An architectural play evolves from the close connection between contemporary architecture and the ancient wall.

Further authors

Laurent Sanz, architect, France; Mohamed Belhouari, architect, Morocco

Main author

Chames Doha Oulkadi, BDA architecture, Morocco/France

Project data

Context Architecture, building and civil engineering
Client Greater Agadir
Background Research project

Memorial: story of a destroyed city

The MEMORIAL OF AGADIR

Demos Doha Oulkadi, BDA architecture, Morocco/France

Submitted to: Holcim Awards 2014 Africa Middle East

Sustainability concept

Further authors

Laurent Sanz, architect, France; Mohamed Belhouari, architect, Morocco

Image 1: The Memorial of Agadir

Image 2: The exterior landscaping offers a panoramic view.

Image 3: A strategic place.

Image 4: Section and façade.

Image 5: Section and façade.

Image 6: Plan.

Image 7: Material.

Image 8: A public place.

Image 9: Concept.

Image 10: A local project.