

## The Agency of Award Systems in Architecture: The Case of Cyprus

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**Abstract :** Architectural awards, especially if they are given by the state, recognize excellence in the field and, at the same time, strongly contribute to the making of the architectural culture of a place. The present research looks at the houses that have been awarded through such a system in Cyprus in order to discuss the values promoted, directly or not, by such a setup which is quite similar to other prestigious award systems such as the Mies van de Rohe Prize in Europe. In fact, many of the projects signed out through the state award system end up being selected to represent the country for the European awards. The residential architecture encouraged by such systems is quite interesting in that the most public of institutions influence how the most private unit of society is architecturally accommodated. The methodology uses both qualitative as well as quantitative research tools in order to analyze: the official state call for entries to the competition; the final report of the evaluation committee; the spatial characteristics of the houses through the Space Syntax methodology; the statements of the architects regarding their intentions and the final outcome; the feelings of the owners and users of the houses regarding the design process as well as the degree of satisfaction regarding the final product. The above-mentioned analyses allow for a more thorough discussion regarding not only the values promoted explicitly by the system through the brief that describes what the evaluation committee is looking for but also the values that are actually being promoted indirectly through the results of the actual evaluation itself. The findings suggest that: the strong emphasis in brief on bioclimatic design and issues of sustainability weakens significantly, if at all present, in the actual selection process; continuous improvement seems to be fuzzily used as a concept; most of the houses tend to have a similar spatial genotype; most of the houses have similar aesthetic qualities; discrepancies between the proposed lifestyle through the design and the actual use of the spaces do not seem to be acknowledged in the evaluation as an issue; the temporal factor seems to be ignored as the projects are required to be 'finished projects' as though the users and their needs do not change through time. The research suggests that, rather than preserving a critical attitude regarding the role of the architect in society, the state award system tends, like any other non-reflective social organism, to simply promote its own unexamined values as well as prejudices. This is perhaps more evident in the shared aesthetic character of the awarded houses and less so in the hidden spatial genotype to which they belong. If the design of houses is indeed a great opportunity for architecture to contribute in a more deliberate manner to the evolution of society, then what the present study shows is that this opportunity seems to be largely missed. The findings may serve better less as a verdict and more as a chance for introspection and discussion.

**Keywords :** award systems, houses, spatial genotype, aesthetic qualities

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