



## Thresholds of Transformation: The Architect's Evolving Role in the 1979-2024 Pritzker Prize

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### ABSTRACT

The Pritzker Architecture Prize has been awarded annually since 1979 to architects who have made inspiring contributions to society and architecture. This article aims to explore the evolving role of the architect in the social, political, and cultural context of architecture through discourse and content analysis. The discourse surrounding the Prize provides remarkable arguments about the underlying philosophy and principles that structure architectural thinking, practice, and the role ascribed to the architect. Based on the analysis of the Pritzker archival corpus, this study finds that the main principles of the Pritzker Prize have changed fundamentally over almost half a century. It points out the transformation of three critical thresholds in the role of the architect between the autonomous figure, the celebrity figure, and the socially engaged public figure. It seeks to uncover the underlying themes, narratives, and shifts that have shaped the profession over the past four decades, providing a comprehensive understanding of how architects have defined, responded to, and influenced the ever-changing built environment. It offers to construct a narrative of the changing role of the architect while reading how these changes reflect broader tendencies, privileges, or disparities in architecture and its response to global and local challenges.

**Keywords:** architect's role, discourse analysis, Pritzker Prize, thresholds

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In its broadest sense, architecture is an activity that spans all dimensions of spaces subject to human experience, from their production and construction to their use, and from their intellectual apprehension to their expression in concepts, texts, or drawings. This multi-layered field not only presents disciplinary challenges in defining architecture but also raises broader cultural and socio-political questions about its practice, the architects' identity, and their responsibilities. Since the first definition of architecture around 2000 years ago, "what is architecture" and "how it is practiced" have remained central to the evolving paradigms of thought and creation. Architectural practice is defined and expressed through debates encompassing artistic creation, construction activity, functionality, and its status as a social or autonomous profession. "In parallel with the changes in the world, the act of working and the architectural production milieu are differentiating, and the architect's way of working." (Topçuoğlu 2024, p.1) Today, discussions about whether the architect is a builder, an artist, a theoretician, a software developer, or a social activist are still relevant amid evolving thinking and making practices. Furthermore, awards given to architectural works and architects have long promoted the questioning of certain ideas, modes of production, or actions while shaping contemporary debates.

Among various international awards such as RIBA, Aga Khan, Mies van der Rohe.... etc. the Pritzker Prize is widely known in architecture and is declared the "Nobel of Architecture" as



it is claimed (URL1). It recognizes architects whose work has contributed significantly to practice and the built environment through “the art of architecture”. While promoting and celebrating individual contributions, the Pritzker Prize serves as an agent for the architectural profession’s evolving ideals, values, and challenges. Therefore, the Pritzker Prize offers unique insights into the shifting role of architects over time by examining the anthology of laureates and the architectural philosophies they embody.

Reading the changing role of the architect through the Pritzker Prize anthology is crucial for understanding the discursive status of the awards in the discipline of architecture. The laureates’ works, selection criteria of the juries and philosophies ensure an archive to discover architectural tendencies and movements of the era. Each laureate’s appreciation reflects the profession’s response to broader socio-political, cultural, and environmental problems, contexts, highlighting how architects respond to and influence their surroundings. Moreover, the Pritzker Prize’s emphasis on different aspects of architectural “success” or “excellence” in technical proficiency, cultural sensitivity, and/or social impact presents the anticipatory criteria for what is considered “significant in the profession”. This evolution, therefore, presents the expanding complexity of architectural thinking and practice, where the role of the architect has enlarged from merely designing buildings to remarking local practices to global challenges such as urbanization, climate change, and social equity. Thus, it can be claimed that prominent awards in the field like Pritzker designate a discourse that structures architectural thinking and practice. This discourse of the Pritzker Prize, including official statements, jury citations, and acceptance speeches, offers a rich repository of knowledge for analyzing the changing and circulating identities, narratives and relations within the architectural community. It is possible to trace the shifts in the profession's definition, perception and its engagement with contemporary issues by critically examining these discourses. In this study, it is aimed to explore the evolving role of the architect by conducting a content and discourse analysis of the Pritzker Prize from its inception in 1979 to 2024. Through this analysis, this article seeks to uncover the underlying themes and narratives that have shaped the profession over the past four decades, providing a comprehensive understanding of how architectures have defined and relatedly how architects responded to and influenced the ever-changing built environment.

## **2. CHARTING THE COURSE: THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE PRITZKER PRIZE**

The identity and role of the architect could be analyzed in various ways from different perspectives. This study aims to trace and comprehend the changing role of the architect in different geographies and societies from an alternative perspective, namely through the analysis of the Pritzker Prize anthology. The history from 1979, when the awards started to be given, to the present day constitutes the context of the research. As the history of the Pritzker Prize runs across the context of contemporary architecture, the relevant advances in technology, environmental concerns, and local-global design strategies, as well as critical issues such as the energy crisis and economic recessions, are strong parameters that determine the decisive turning points in the history of the prize.

The Pritzker Prize has been given out annually since 1979 through the Hyatt Foundation which the Pritzker family of Chicago established. The Foundation defines the main motivation for the international award as “to honor a living architect or architects whose built work demonstrates a combination of those qualities of talent, vision, and commitment, which has produced consistent and significant contributions to humanity and the built environment through the art of architecture.” (URL1)

The laureates receive \$100,000 and a bronze medallion with one side inscribed Vitruvius’ fundamental principles of architecture of *firmitas*, *utilitas*, *venustas* (Figure 1, URL1). Although the definition of Vitruvius is outdated and contradicts the contemporary ideas the institution defends by awarding, the prize is presented to the laureate(s) in a splendid ceremony at an architecturally significant location around the world. (URL1). In 2022, for

example, the ceremony took place in the Marshall Building in London (Figure 1, URL1). It is possible to observe contradictions between the ideas defended by the award-winning architects, their architectural practices, and the places chosen for the award ceremony that year. In 2000 for instance, when Ren Koolhaas was awarded with his iconic buildings, the ceremony took place in Jerusalem Archaeological Park, Jerusalem, Israel where the antiquity and historical context were promoted. When it comes to the nomination criterion, it is as follows: "Each year, the Executive Director requests suggestions from more than 200 people who are knowledgeable about architecture, such as critics, architects, past laureates, museum directors, academics, business professionals, and others. Additionally, any licensed architect from any place in the world may send in a suggestion for the prize." (Peltason & Yan, 2017, p.15) The independent jury members include professionals from a variety of fields in architecture, including architects, academics, and critics.



**Figure 1.** The Pritzker Prize Ceremony (2022) and the Medallion  
Source: Edited by the Authors (Figures from URL 1)

### 3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Several studies investigate different aspects of the Pritzker Prize. Sorkin (2005) focuses on the demographics of the laureates, particularly in terms of country and age, as well as the composition of the jury over the years. Heynen (2012) conducts a discourse analysis that uncovers gender bias and addresses male dominance in jury citations. Mahdavinejad and Hosseini (2019) examine the network of jury members alongside the content of jury citations "to evaluate the relationship between the jury members and their cooperation network with the discourses formed over time." (Mahdavinejad and Hosseini 2019, p.71) Different than the existing literature, this research employs a critical framework including content and discourse analysis methods to explore the evolving role of the architect as reflected through the Pritzker Prize from 1979 to 2024. Discourse analysis is used to examine how definitions, classifications, and statements for "the architect" shape and reflect social and professional architectural practices. The first step of this methodological approach includes archival research through the textual and visual records and data collection from the announcements, jury citations, ceremony videos, official statements of the laureates, highlights on the Pritzker Prize official website, and articles, interviews, and



critiques published in the journals. Textual analysis is used for coding the collected data and developing a comprehensive reading on how the laureates' contributions are described by recurring themes, terminologies, and narratives that create broader discourses surrounding each prize. The next step is mapping the findings for a cross-comparison of different periods through the revealed transformations, continuities, shifts, and breaks in the discourse. The comparative analysis generated from the map makes visible "the evolution in the roles and responsibilities ascribed" to architects as well as "the criteria for excellence as perceived" by the Pritzker jury over time. Interpreting findings offers to construct a narrative of the changing role of the architect while reading how these changes reflect broader tendencies, privileges, or disparities in the architectural profession and its response to global and local challenges. The following section explains the main arguments derived from the content and discourse analysis in more detail for each of the three thresholds.

(Juries)	PRITZKER PRIZE ACTORS	(Laureates)
"50 years of imagination and vitality"	1979	"architecture is art nothing else"
"architecture, the mother of the arts"		"no convictions, but taste"
"architecture as a sublime act of the poetic imagination"	1980	"my architecture is autobiographical"
"a stoical acceptance of solitude"		"the act of building is, in itself, a creative process."
"a prodigy for so many years"	1981	"the art of architecture has always been the priority"
"a mature leader of world architecture"		"I start with the individuals -the psyche "
"an architect who makes technology serve his art"	1982	"architecture is a very utilitarian art"
"the achievements of pre-eminent architects all over the world"		"architecture has to contain human activity"
"global recognition for the past three decades"	1983	"climate, history, culture, life play a part in architectural expression"
"his skill he has elevated the use of materials to an art"		"my involvement with art and with museums has been lifelong"
"he has created structures which are personal, vigorous, original"	1984	
"an architect who is also an artist"	1985	"I still see the architect as an all-rounder"
"the Jury salutes him as a superb teacher"		"you can be an architect and an artist"
"son, grandson, husband and father of architects"	1986	"architecture can encourage a sense of community"
"in the course of a career of over forty years"		
"as architect, teacher, and philosopher of architecture"	1987	"severe conditions of postwar Japan"
"given talent, energy, and a sufficiently long career"		"to convert Japanese tradition into something new and creative"
"two masters of modern architecture"	1988	"plastic freedom and architectural inventiveness"
"a tribute to architects from North and South America"		"I like my architecture to speak for me"
"sophisticated and adventurous aesthetic"	1989	"I have freedom in my drawings"
"the great body of work of architect Frank Gehry"		"architecture is surely an art"
"as a theorist, philosopher, artist and teacher"	1990	"I have access to a privileged way of looking"
"with built works, writings, teaching and theories"	1991	"architecture is above all an art in the background"
"in the past three decades..."		"you must learn from your environment"
"over the past four decades"	1992	"Architecture is Art or it is not Architecture"
"a subtle mastery underlying"		"autonomous and contrary to dispersal."
"as a prolific author as well as architect and teacher"	1993	"emphasizing the autonomy of individual architectural elements"
"intelligent and artistic in concept and expression"		"cultural act in response to common imagination"
"a gifted composer using space, structure, texture, form, light and color all shaped by his personal vision"	1994	"architecture needs an artistic investment."
"a high wire artist with sure and confident footwork"		"I was already drawing and painting and sculpting"
"as a self-taught architect, with no architectural degree or even training with a master architect"	1995	"I began as a craftsman and a builder working with my hands."
"the importance of craftsmanship"	1996	"the site is where architecture is"
"confident and timeless quality indicative of a master architect"		"architecture standing in its own presence"
"mutual interaction of theory, practice and teaching"	1997	"to read the language of the landscape"
"modern forms tempered by the Scandinavian tradition"		"I have a deal with the climate, the nature, the topography"
"one of the post World War II generation of architects"	1998	"architecture is sometimes humanistic, sometimes materialistic"
"a 60-year-old Italian architect who builds all over the world"		"if there is an art that is about freedom, it's architecture"
"a rare melding of art, architecture, and engineering"	1999	"architecture is a social art—a necessity, and not a luxury"
"worldwide acclaim for his modernist buildings"		"in the 70s we were pushing the idea of an ecological architecture"
"the use of modern technology pushed to its artistic limit"	2000	"an architect with theoretical and literary interests"
"a new millennium, an architect in tune with the future"		"collaboration is fundamental to architectural practice."
"a prophet of a new modern architecture"	2001	"the challenges and possibilities of the twenty-first century."
"the artistry of an age-old profession with the fresh approach of a new century's technical capabilities"		"being architects rather than artists"
"a long term true collaboration"	2002	"the firm is capable of functioning well without us"
"In an age obsessed with celebrity, the glitz of our architects, as a total contrast, our laureate works in a one-person office"		"I understand: culture, built form, climate that make up place"
"innovative architectural technician"	2003	"very ordinary and simple things can also be ecological"
"the great iconic buildings of the twentieth century"		"I have the building in my head like a composer has his symphony"
"a symbol for not only a city, but a whole country"	2004	"the building needed to be a sculpture"
"to honor a woman for the first time"		"it's still very difficult to be a female working in architecture"
"her body of work is relatively small, she has achieved greater promise for the future"	2005	"people think me as famous, tremendous amount of press interest"
"the use of today's art and technology to create a dynamic style"		"how can I become famous?"
"Morphosis, Mayne's firm, to the front ranks of the profession"	2006	"architecture shifted from a more provincial, geographically dominated culture to a global one."
"the lessons from a practicing architect and a teacher, are universal"		"the discussion among architects on an international level"
"the most outstanding architect of Brazil, a career of six decades"	2007	"buildings should inspire, and compose cities that celebrate society"
"Richard Rogers, whose firm Richard Rogers Partnership is headquartered in London"		"it [the building] marks a big moment in time"
"landmark of late twentieth century design"	2008	"Art needs to be experienced widely, by a greater public involvement."
"international attention"		"I am integrating every properly founded demand"
"above all, an insatiable urge for creative experimentation"	2009	"the real core of architectural work lies in the construction."
"for a specific use in a specific place and for a specific society"		"I have an office with fourteen people, not 40 or 140"
"a master architect admired by his colleagues around the world"	2010	"it is all about the context, that is the decisive factor"
"more than 15 years, architects Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa have worked together in their collaborative partnership, SANAA"		"it is a male-dominated society, there aren't many women."
"the 'equivalence of spaces,' creating unpretentious, democratic buildings according to the task and budget at hand"	2011	"problems we must not neglect: energy, resources, costs, social aspects"
"during the past three decades, he has produced a body of work"		"The climates are different, the customs are different."
"always mindful of context, and grounded in place and time"	2012	"a good architect should have a thorough experience of the society"
"the careful use of resources and respect for tradition and context"		"I'm just a local architect. I call my practice a studio, not a company"
"in spite of his age, young for an architect, he has shown his ability"	2013	"architecture is bound by various social constraints"
"outstanding architecture for more than 40 years"		"our architecture has traditionally been linked with nature"
"always coupled with public responsibility"	2014	"to make a contribution to society"
"inventive and resourceful design approach for humanitarian efforts"		"I have always used everyday materials and technologies"
"to work with local citizens, volunteers and students"	2015	"the wish to be useful to society"
"simple, low-cost, recyclable shelters and community buildings"		"to consume less material, less concrete and less energy, but build in a humane way using what's available: earth, water, air."
"adaptable, changeable and carefully use limited resources"	2016	"architecture is a collective discipline"
"a definition of architect to include researcher, inventor, engineer, builder, teacher, collaborator, environmentalist, humanist"		"we don't think ourselves as artists"
"the revival of a more socially engaged architect"	2017	"the more anchored you're in the society, the better"
"the economic opportunity to the less privileged, to mitigate the effects of natural disasters, to reduce energy consumption"		"our roots firmly in place, our arms outstretched to the rest of the world"
"three architects working collaboratively for nearly three decades"	2018	"we're the result of a place, a climate, a culture"
"to create spaces that are in discourse with their respective contexts"		"to discover new regionally adopted contemporary expression for a sustainable holistic habitat"
"to affect humanity is deeply personal, responsive, and meaningful"	2019	"to provide the lowest class with the proper dwelling"
"architect, urban planner, and educator for the past 70 years"		"the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. So, my first experience of architecture was the void of architecture, I began to consider how people might rebuild their homes and cities."
"Thoughtful connectivity between global universality and local identity through his comprehensive cross-cultural and interdisciplinary solutions"	2020	"to be aware of the various levels of citizenship"
"acute sensitivities to geography, changing climates and nature"		"good architecture must be something familiar, useful and beautiful"
"architecture is a cultural spatial phenomenon that people invent"	2021	"Our work is about solving constraints and problems"
"to benefit the individual socially, ecologically and economically"		"concerns in climate, democracy and scarcity are concerns for us all."
"to respond to the climatic and ecological emergencies and social urgencies"	2022	"I considered my work a duty to this community"
"architect, educator and social activist"		"to address the challenges of climate change and societal inequality"
"his commitment to social justice and engagement"	2023	"a more prominent and engaged role in creating not only a more beautiful world but a fairer and more sustainable one too"
"civic architect, urban planner and activist"		"to recognise space, is to recognise an entire community"
"his social and environmental commitment"	2024	"to live in community rather than in isolation"
"architect and social advocate"		
"his works are always connected to society"		

**Figure 2.** Content Analysis of the Pritzker Prize  
 Source: Produced by the Authors

#### 4. THE MAIN ARGUMENTS UNFOLDED: AN INQUIRY INTO THE THREE THRESHOLDS

When the demographics of laureates are analyzed, it can be observed that from 1979 to 2024, half of the winners were awarded from Europe and the remaining half is mainly from Asia and America, besides unique 'exceptions' from Africa and Oceania. (Table 1) Although twenty-three different countries have had at least one architect receiving the prize, it has 'often' been given to Western architects. Furthermore, as "many male 'starchitects' and very few female role model architects" (Makwaney, 2021, p.3) were honored, a gender-biased pattern is quite obvious. In 2004, Zaha Hadid became the first female architect in history to be awarded the Pritzker Prize and is still the only female architect to have won this prize alone. "A woman of Arab origin became the 28 laureates. Of the previous 27 winners, all were men; of those, 21 were white, four were Asian, and two were Latino." (Sorkin, 2005, p.107) However, in the last two decades of prize history, a transformation in these criticized stabilization patterns towards a diversity of nationalities and genders has been observed. (Table 1)

Three distinct critical thresholds indicate the principal shifts in the history of the Pritzker Prize. Therefore, Table 1 lists the laureates in the three defined periods, namely 1974-1999, 2000s, and 2010-2024. It is observed that the Pritzker Prize emphasizes the autonomy of the architect between 1979 and the 1990s, a starchitect manifestation in the 2000s, and an emphasis on the social engagement of the architect from the 2010s to the present. (Figure 2)

**Table 1.** The demographics of the Pritzker Laureates (By the Authors According to the Pritzker Official Website)

	Laureates	Nationality	Award Year	Gender	Age
1979-1999	Philip Johnson	The USA	1979	male	73
	Luis Barragán	Mexico	1980	male	78
	James Stirling	Great Britain	1981	male	55
	Kevin Roche	The USA	1982	male	60
	Ieoh Ming Pei	China	1983	male	66
	Richard Meier	The USA	1984	male	50
	Hans Hollein	Austria	1985	male	51
	Gottfried Böhm	Germany	1986	male	66
	Kenzo Tange	Japan	1987	male	74
	Oscar Niemeyer- Gordon Bunshaft	Brazil, The USA	1988	male-male	81-79
	Frank Gehry	The USA	1989	male	60
	Aldo Rossi	Italy	1990	male	59
	Robert Venturi	The USA	1991	male	66
	Alvaro Siza	Portugal	1992	male	59
	Fumihiko Maki	Japan	1993	male	65
	Christian de Portzamparc	France	1994	male	50
	Tadao Ando	Japan	1995	male	53
	Rafael Moneo	Spain	1996	male	58
	Sverre Fehn	Norway	1997	male	72
Renzo Piano	Italy	1998	male	60	
Norman Foster	Great Britain	1999	male	63	
2000s	Rem Koolhaas	The Netherlands	2000	male	56
	Jacques Herzog- Pierre deMeuron	Switzerland	2001	male-male	51-51
	Glenn Murcutt	Austria	2002	male	66
	Jørn Utzon	Denmark	2003	male	84
	Zaha Hadid	Great Britain	2004	female	84
	Thom Mayne	The USA	2005	male	61
	Paulo Mendes da Rocha	Brazil	2006	male	77
	Richard Rogers	Great Britain	2007	male	73
	Jean Nouvel	France	2008	male	62
Peter Zumthor	Switzerland	2009	male	65	
2010-2024	Kazuyo Sejima-Ryue Nishizawa	Japan	2010	female-male	54-44
	Eduardo Souto de Moura	Portugal	2011	male	58
	Wang Shu	China	2012	male	48
	Toyo Ito	Japan	2013	male	71



<b>Shigeru Ban</b>	Japan	2014	male	56
<b>Frei Otto</b>	Germany	2015	male	90
<b>Alejandro Aravena</b>	Chile	2016	male	48
<b>Rafael Aranda-Carme Pigem and Ramon Vilalta</b>	Spain	2017	male-female-male	56-55-57
<b>Balkrishna Doshi</b>	India	2018	male	91
<b>Arata Isozaki</b>	Japan	2019	male	88
<b>Yvonne Farrell-Shelley McNamara</b>	Ireland	2020	female-female	69-68
<b>Anne Lacaton</b>	France-Morocco	2021	female-male	66-67
<b>Jean-Philippe Vassal</b>	France-Morocco	2021	female-male	66-67
<b>Diébédo Francis Kéré</b>	Burkina Faso	2022	male	57
<b>David Alan Chipperfield</b>	Great Britain	2023	male	70
<b>Riken Yamamoto</b>	Japan	2024	male	79

#### 4.1. The First Threshold (1979–1990s): The Autonomy of the Architect

It is critical to note that autonomy is a loaded term, and this paper does not intend to provide a comprehensive and exhaustive account of the research. However, it contends that analyzing the Pritzker Prize is an alternative way of examining the ideological transformation from the autonomy of the architect from the end of the 20th century to the present.

The Pritzker Prize is awarded to the architect as a subject, but not to the specific projects. The first threshold of the Pritzker Prize approaches the architect as a seminal figure who was already a well-known actor in the discipline in the late 20th century. Therefore, 'the Pritzker was mainly understood as a lifetime achievement award' (Valencia, 2022) for the juries of the first threshold.



Figure 3. The Analysis of the First Threshold

Source: Produced by the Authors

The content and discourse analysis of the Pritzker jury's reports and the laureate's statements in the first threshold reveal several critical issues addressing the autonomy of the architect. First and foremost, the jury emphasizes the relationship between "art and architecture" as a recurring theme of discussion. It defines architectural



autonomy as "artistic freedom" and "the individual practice" as the architect as an autonomous actor. The terms "art, sublime act, creative process, imagination, plastic freedom, artistic investment, sophisticated aesthetic" feature heavily in both the jury reports and the statements of the laureates to describe the phenomenon of architecture. (Figure 3) Accordingly, the analyses show that the architect is "an artist, a gifted composer, a philosopher, and/or a theorist" in the first threshold. (Figure 3) That is, in addition to the idea of the architect's artistic autonomy, the architect is assigned another type of role that interacts with the philosophy and theory of architecture, namely that of philosopher, theorist, or teacher. Several laureates of the first threshold, such as James Stirling (1981), Aldo Rossi (1990), Robert Venturi (1991), Fumihiko Maki (1993), and Rafael Moneo (1996) are theorists who have had a long-standing influence on architectural theory. (1) Moreover, the landmarks of contemporary architecture include the works of the seminal figures of the first threshold in the history of the Pritzker Prize. Critically, there are no female prizewinners in the first threshold, as the discipline was dominated by "male masterminds" at the time. Similarly, "until 1987, the jury had no inclusion of a female member." (Makwaney, 2021, p.5) In other words, the autonomy of the architect in this period stratifies with the issue of male dominance in the discipline. Another obvious statement in the jury reports is the length of professional experience, which is often addressed by phrases such as "fifty years of experience, a career of forty years, a sufficiently long career, over the past four decades". (Figure 3) The architectural autonomy is defined and promoted by the criterion of "mastery" based on the "duration of professional experience". Mentioning the issue of mastery underlying, the laureates of the first threshold, including Meier (1984), Tange (1987), Ando (1995), and Fehn (1997) express their indebtedness to the modern masterminds. That is, the virtue of independence and the issue of authorship embodied by the 'modern masters' leave a legacy to their contemporaries in the first threshold of the Pritzker Prize. All in all, the immanent and self-referential properties of architecture could be traced by the following expressions of the laureates of the first threshold. Luis Barragán (1980) exemplifies the autonomy of the architect based on self-referentiality as follows: "My architecture is autobiographical." (Peltason & Yan, 2017, p.1388) Hans Hollein (1985) states "I still see the architect as an 'all-rounder'. Clear authorship of the architect for a project still exists." (Peltason & Yan, 2017, p.1234) Frank Gehry (1989) states "I tried everything. Maybe I went wrong. [...] I thought I was being quite personal." (Yoshio, 2002 as cited in Peltason & Yan, 2017)

To sum up, the idea of autonomy of the architect is evident in the first threshold of the history of the Pritzker Prize. However, the initial traces of the social, cultural, local, and environmental aspects and attributes of the profession can also be monitored, albeit as non-dominant and particular cases. The Asian laureates of the first threshold, Pei (1983), Tange (1987), Maki (1993), and Ando (1995), for example, emphasize the themes of "culture, community, tradition, history, post-war memory, and climate". (Figure 3) These exceptional and singular alternative calls mark the dawn of a change in the architectural agenda and thus also in the scope of the Pritzker Prize. Christian de Portzamparc (1994) states that "in the face of change, with the abolition of doctrines, the [Pritzker] Prize committee has been obliged to adopt another stance." (Peltason & Yan, 2017, p.922) That is, towards the end of the 1990s, there was a shift in the selection principles of the Pritzker Prize, which will be discussed in the following section.

## 4.2. The Second Threshold (2000s): Starchitect as an Emerging Celebrity Figure

(Juries)		(Laureates)
<p>"a new millennium, an architect in tune with the future"          "a prophet of a new modern architecture"          "the artistry of an age-old profession"          with the fresh approach of a new century's technical capabilities"          "a long term true collaboration"          "In an age obsessed with celebrity, the glitz of our 'starchitects,'          as a total contrast, our laureate works in a one-person office"          "innovative architectural technician"          "the great iconic buildings of the twentieth century"          "a symbol for not only a city, but a whole country"          "to honor a woman for the first time"          "her body of work is relatively small,          she has achieved greater promise for the future"          "the use of today's art and technology to create a dynamic style"          "Morphosis, Mayne's firm, to the front ranks of the profession"          the lessons from a practicing architect and a teacher, are universal"          "the most outstanding architect of Brazil, a career of six decades"          "Richard Rogers, whose firm Richard Rogers Partnership          is headquartered in London"          "landmark of late twentieth century design"          "international attention"          "above all, an insatiable urge for creative experimentation"          "for a specific use in a specific place and for a specific society"          "a master architect admired by his colleagues around the world"          "more than 15 years, architects Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa,          have worked together in their collaborative partnership, SANAA"          "the "equivalence of spaces," creating unpretentious, democratic</p>	<p>... 2000          ... 2001          ... 2002          ... 2003          ... 2004          ... 2005          ... 2006          ... 2007          ... 2008          ... 2009          ... 2010</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">STARCHITECT</p>	<p>"an architect with theoretical and literary interests"          "collaboration is fundamental to architectural practice. "          "the challenges and possibilities of the twenty-first century."          "being architects rather than artists"          "the firm is capable of functioning well without us"          "I understand: culture, built form, climate that make up place"          "very ordinary and simple things can also be ecological"          "I have the building in my head like a composer has his symphony"          "the building needed to be a sculpture"          "it's still very difficult to be a female working in architecture"          "people think me as famous, a tremendous amount of press interest"          "how can I become famous?"          "architecture shifted from a more provincial,          geographically dominated culture to a global one. "          "the discussion among architects on an international level"          "buildings should inspire, and compose cities that celebrate society"          "it [the building] marks a big moment in time"          "Art needs to be experienced widely, by a greater public involvement. "          "I am integrating every properly founded demand"          "the real core of architectural work lies in the construction. "          "I have an office with fourteen people, not 40 or 140"          "it is all about the context, that is the decisive factor "          "it is a male-dominated society, there aren't many women."          "problems we must not neglect: energy, resources, costs, social aspects"</p>

**Figure 4.** The Analysis of the Second Threshold

Source: Produced by the Authors

The Pritzker jury's reports and the laureate's statements in the second threshold emphasize several key points. Firstly, the jury recursively introduces the criticality of the new millennium for architectural practice into the discussion. The new agenda of the architectural practice is discussed through the debates around the "modern technology of a new millennium, a new century's technical capabilities, in tune with the future, promise for the future" in the jury reports. (Figure 4) The rapid growth of technology through new applications, techniques, innovations, and services in the first decade of the 21st century is reflected in the statements of the laureates and juries. Furthermore, the architectural practice of the new century calls for "international attention and worldwide acclaim" (Figure 4) in the second threshold of the Pritzker Prize and it "relates to spectacle, signature, iconicity, and media attention". (Dreher, Alaily-Mattar, and Thierstein 2023, p.69) In this context, a fundamentally new term appears for the first time in the reports of the Pritzker jury in the 2000s, namely the "starchitect". The architect as an autonomous figure in the first threshold of the Pritzker Prize is now, in a sense, an internationally recognized celebrity figure with the definition of "artistry, symbol, iconic, innovative, landmark" buildings. (Figure 4) In addition, there is a shift in ideology towards collaboration from the autonomous master architect with the indication of "fame and recognition". The capitalist globalization of the time leads to cities being branded iconic buildings by celebrity architects. As a result, the Pritzker Prize has been awarded to several Western "starchitects" in the second threshold, including Rem Koolhaas (2000), Zaha Hadid (2004), and Jean Nouvel (2008). "A global cadre of starchitects and their practices are fundamentally aligned with the shift of many cities to plan star-driven vehicles in order to capture capital." (Tarazona-Vento and Atkinson 2024, p.1) The world-renowned firms, headquarters, companies, and collaborations in which large numbers of people work define the ground of the architectural practice in the second threshold. These architectural firms realize a wide range of high-budget architectural and urban planning projects around the world. Rem Koolhaas (2000), for example, describes the working environment of his globally known firm OMA as follows: "In the beginning one of these was a creation of something called OMA, where my identity was submerged in a group, and that's how we've always worked, as a group." (Peltason & Yan, 2017, p.703) In addition to the role of founder of OMA, Koolhaas is also a theorist and academic. Zaha Hadid (2004) studied under Rem Koolhaas in her fourth year at the Architectural Association and joined OMA after graduating in 1977. In the jury's announcement, Hadid is described as a young, promising female architect yet with a small body of work. (URL1) The jury envisions her path to worldwide recognition as a starchitect through her 'signature style' of undulating buildings. She has become an architectural icon of the 21st century. After winning the Pritzker Prize in 2004, she has been a member of the Pritzker jury in 2012. Jean Nouvel (2008) is another prominent architect who has gained international attention with iconic



buildings around the world, such as Institut du Monde Arabe, the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art, and the Agbar Tower. The Pritzker Prize describes his iconic architecture as follows: "Jean Nouvel's projects transform the landscapes in which they are built, often becoming major urban events in their own right." (URL1) Nouvel's architecture firm Ateliers Jean Nouvel has site offices in Paris, Barcelona, Madrid, Rome, and Geneva with a multicultural team of 130 employees from more than twenty countries. (URL2) That is, unlike a local atelier of a number of architects, it is becoming an international company with a globalized branding. Murcutt (2002) and Zumthor (2009), who do not prefer working in such a corporate environment but in a studio atmosphere, are a critical exception to the second threshold.

The second threshold in the history of the Pritzker Prize involves a new generation of architects born during or after the Second World War. These figures entered architectural practice in the 1950s to 1980s when the modernist orthodoxy of the earlier generation was being challenged. The statements of the laureates of the second threshold of the Pritzker Prize summarize this ideological shift very well. For example, Richard Rogers (2007) highlights "architects with responsibilities that go beyond the limits of an autonomous brief." (Rogers, 1997), Mayne (2005) states that "I was intoxicated with the idea of autonomy as a young man." (Peltason & Yan, 2017, p.506)

All in all, "the use of the persona to sell the architectural product [...] for the sake of a signature look [is] seen ethically suspect in the discipline." (Deamer 2005, p.43) Furthermore, the idea of the starchitect has been a controversial topic towards the end of the 2000s. The growing financial crisis, the climate crisis, austerity measures, and scarcity around the world in recent decades have put the heavy spending on iconic architecture in a polemical position. David Chipperfield (2023) addressed the issue in 2008 as follows: "It's an architecture of excess, a consequence of there being too much money around. [...] At a time when people are worried about other things, those things become really irritating and probably less relevant."(URL1) Therefore, the architect should not only design architectural icons, but also be involved in the complex web of cultural, socio-economic, and environmental relationships and concerns, leading to the third threshold in the history of the Pritzker Prize.

### 4.3. The Third Threshold (2010s-2020s): The Architect as a Socially Engaged Public Figure

(Juries)		(Laureates)
"more than 15 years, architects Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa have worked together in their collaborative partnership, SANAA"	2010	"it is all about the context, that is the decisive factor"
"the 'equivalence of spaces,' creating unpretentious, democratic buildings according to the task and budget at hand"	2011	"it is a male-dominated society, there aren't many women."
"during the past three decades, he has produced a body of work"	2012	"I don't think globalization can play such an important role. The climates are different, the customs are different."
"always mindful of context, and grounded in place and time"	2013	"a good architect should have a thorough experience of the society"
"the careful use of resources and respect for tradition and context"	2014	"I'm just a local architect. I call my practice a studio, not a company"
"In spite of his age, young for an architect, he has shown his ability"	2015	"architecture is bound by various social constraints"
"outstanding architecture for more than 40 years"	2016	"our architecture has traditionally been linked with nature"
"always coupled with public responsibility"	2017	"to make a contribution to society"
"inventive and resourceful design approach for humanitarian efforts"	2018	"I have always used everyday materials and technologies"
"to work with local citizens, volunteers and students"	2019	"the wish to be useful to society"
"simple, low-cost, recyclable shelters and community buildings"	2020	"to consume less material, less concrete and less energy, but build in a humane way using what's available: earth, water, air."
"adaptable, changeable and carefully use limited resources"	2021	"architecture is a collective discipline"
"a definition of architect to include researcher, inventor, engineer, builder, teacher, collaborator, environmentalist, humanist"	2022	"we don't think ourselves as artists"
"the revival of a more socially engaged architect"	2023	"the more anchored you're in the society, the better"
"the economic opportunity to the less privileged, to mitigate the effects of natural disasters, to reduce energy consumption"	2024	"our roots firmly in place, our arms outstretched to the rest of the world"
"three architects working collaboratively for nearly three decades"		"we're the result of a place, a climate, a culture"
"to create spaces that are in discourse with their respective contexts"		"to discover new regionally adopted contemporary expression for a sustainable holistic habitat"
"to affect humanity is deeply personal, responsive, and meaningful"		"to provide the lowest class with the proper dwelling"
"architect, urban planner, and educator for the past 70 years"		"the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, So, my first experience of architecture was the void of architecture, I began to consider how people might rebuild their homes and cities."
"Thoughtful connectivity between global universality and local identity through his comprehensive cross-cultural and interdisciplinary solutions"		"humanism and cultural connection with each place and context"
"acute sensitivities to geography, changing climates and nature"		"to be aware of the various levels of citizenship"
"architecture is a cultural spatial phenomenon that people invent"		"good architecture must be something familiar, useful and beautiful"
"to benefit the individual socially, ecologically and economically"		"our work is about solving constraints and problems"
"to respond to the climatic and ecological emergencies and social urgencies"		"concerns in climate, democracy and scarcity are concerns for us all."
"architect, educator and social activist"		"I considered my work a duty to this community"
"his commitment to social justice and engagement"		"to address the challenges of climate change and societal inequality"
"civic architect, urban planner and activist"		"a more prominent and engaged role in creating not only a more beautiful world but a fairer and more sustainable one too".
"his social and environmental commitment"		"to recognise space, is to recognise an entire community"
"architect and social advocate"		"to live in community rather than in isolation"
"his works are always connected to society"		

**Figure 5.** The Analysis of the Third Threshold  
 Source: Produced by the Authors



The analysis in the third threshold draw attention to several remarkable conclusions. First, the jury emphasizes that the field of architecture is fundamentally conditioned by the broader social, cultural, and environmental context in which the architect is a socially integrated and responsible actor. That is, architecture is a catalyst for a social awakening to enhance and improve the everyday experience of the built environment. In this respect, the architect plays a crucial role in uplifting the living environment and building a long-term resilient society. The terms "careful use of resources, budget, low-cost, sensitivities to geography and climate, ecological emergencies, mindful of context, tradition, community, social urgencies, public responsibility, social commitment, societal inequality, humanitarian efforts" appear frequently in the jury reports and the statements of the laureates in the third threshold to describe the current status of the architectural field. (Figure 5) In this regard, the architect is "a social activist, a civic activist, a social advocate, an environmentalist, a humanist, a builder, and/or a researcher" according to the current Pritzker Prize agenda. (Figure 5) In contrast to the Architect, who in the two previous Pritzker Prize thresholds stood in the limelight either as an autonomous or celebrity figure, s/he now becomes an almost anonymous social actor whose socially committed architectural practice dominates the discussion.

As it is underlined, the third threshold in the Pritzker Prize points out that there is a need to recode and reterritorialize the role of architecture so that it incorporates wider social, cultural, and environmental attributes. Accordingly, the architect's manifesto, which emphasizes a lasting impact on society, is now authoritative for the selection criteria of the Pritzker Prize. "In the last decade, the jury has highlighted statements of social commitment by reporting-from-the-front architects." (Valencia, 2022) Another obvious change of principle in the Pritzker jury is the increasing diversity of the laureates in terms of their sociocultural, ethnic, national, or regional origins as well as their working environment and communication networks. First and foremost, architects as important public figures in a non-European context have been underlined by the jury several times in the last decade. The Japanese context (2010, 2013, 2014, 2019, 2024), the Chinese context (2012), the Chilean context (2016), the Indian context (2018), and the African context (2022) are the five non-European contexts that have received the Pritzker Prize in the third threshold. For example, Shigeru Ban (2014) is a Japanese architect who won the Pritzker at the age of 56. "His sense of responsibility and positive action to create architecture of quality to serve society's needs, combined with his original approach to these humanitarian challenges" (URL 1) is prominent in the jury announcement. He is now an internationally inspiring figure for the development and dissemination of open-source strategies for emergency shelters. The use of recycled cardboard tubes as an innovative emergency material for rapid construction is a result of his architectural manifesto for social engagement and environmental concerns. In 1999 and 2023, Shigeru Ban built Paper Log Houses after the earthquakes in Turkey with the help of his organization VAN (Voluntary Architects' Network), in which architecture students are also involved. VAN helps students to realize the critical role of the social responsibility of architecture. As can be seen, besides being a practicing architect, Ban gives lectures and teaches at architecture schools around the world and non-governmental organizations, such as VAN. In the principal shift of the Pritzker Prize towards the idea of the architect as a socially involved actor, universities and non-governmental organizations are becoming crucial interfaces to inspire architectural candidates.

Another unique case in this period is Alejandro Aravena (2016), a Chilean architect who received the prize at the age of 48, making him one of only three younger prizewinners in their mid-forties. The jury states that "Alejandro Aravena has pioneered a collaborative practice that produces powerful works of architecture and also addresses key challenges of the 21st century." (URL1) Aravena highlights the social requirements and environmental concerns in his manifesto. He is the director of a "Do Tank" called ELEMENTAL, which deals with projects that serve the public interest and social impact. ELEMENTAL facilitates a multi-actor approach involving local authorities, researchers, residents, and architects. In



this way, the fields of participatory architecture, community architecture, and/or public architecture find an alternative common ground to practice truly collaborative solutions for the needs of the 21st century. Aravena is a versatile actor in the field of architecture, ranging from a practicing architect to an academic, the Director of the Venice Architecture Biennale 2016, the jury chair of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, and a member of a variety of advisory boards, etc. Another non-European laureate case in this threshold is the Indian architect Balkrishna Doshi (2018), who was honored as the oldest Pritzker Prize winner in history at the age of 91. Doshi was an important figure in the Indian architectural context. His recognized works, especially in the fields of urban planning and social housing, contribute to the Indian society and architectural context. The phrase "to discover new regionally adopted contemporary expression for a sustainable holistic habitat" (URL1) in his manifesto is indicative of his unique contribution. Finally, Francis Kéré (2022) marked a pivotal threshold in the history of the Pritzker Prize, as he is the first African architect to receive the annual international award. He draws attention to the local adaptation and coping strategies as an effective response to the climate crisis and the scarcity of resources. The role of architects and the architectural practice in the context of extreme scarcity once again moved onto the architectural agenda at the 2022 Pritzker Prize. The revaluation of local techniques and participatory design strategies and tactics in architectural practice compensates for the adverse circumstances of the underserved communities. The jury addresses the unique contribution of Kéré as follows: "Kéré contributes to the debate by incorporating local, national, regional and global dimensions in a very personal balance of grassroots experience, academic quality, low tech, high tech, and truly sophisticated multiculturalism. [...] He has shown us how locality becomes a universal possibility." (URL1) All in all, Ban, Aravena, Doshi, and Kéré, as the representatives of the socially engaged architect, have presented a variety of alternative strategies for socially responsible architectural practice.

The diversity of the laureates in the third threshold of the Pritzker Prize is not limited to sociocultural, ethnic, national, or regional origin. The range of working methods and activity patterns of architectural practice expanded as well. In the last decade of the Pritzker Prize's history, several collectives of partners have been honored. That is, the third threshold of the history of the prize highlights the importance of collaborative thinking and designing. Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, partners of the Japanese architecture firm, SANAA, were chosen as the 2010 laureates of the Pritzker Architecture Prize. 2017 marks another pivotal point when a trio (two males and a female), the Spanish architectural group, Rafael Aranda, Carme Pigemand, and Ramon Vilalta, won the award for the first time. The team took part in the Venice Architecture Biennale 2018. The team draws attention to the theme of rooted architecture as follows: "We want our architecture to sink its roots deeply into its specific location." (Peltason & Yan, 2017, p.33) It was the first time that two female Irish architects had won the Pritzker Prize in 2020. The following year, in 2021, Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal, the founders of the Paris-based firm, won the award.

To sum up, the third threshold in the history of the Pritzker Prize approaches the architect primarily as a socially engaged public figure. In this period, "the Pritzker prize jury is aware of the diversity of directions, thought and visions." (Rahmoun 2018, p.149) In this respect, the diversity of approaches for the selection criteria of the jury unfolds. There is a wide range of possibilities in terms of the social, cultural, geographical, or political context of the laureates in the third threshold. In addition, the types of working environments of the laureates vary, including collective partner formations, multi-actor organizations, non-governmental organizations, and schools of architecture. All in all, the thresholds of transformation mentioned in the article address the shifting role of the architect over time from an autonomous and/or iconic figure to a socially committed everyday actor, which is reflected in architectural thought and practice and even in the way architects interact with their buildings. Figure 6 shows how the three architects from the above three thresholds

strike a pose with their buildings, by taking precedence, being iconic or staying in the background.



**Figure 6.** (Top) The Glass House by Johnson, (Middle) Riverside Museum by Hadid, (Bottom) Gando Public Library by Kéré  
Source: Edited by the Authors; (Top: URL3; Middle: URL4; Bottom: URL5)

## 5. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

This article proposes to follow an alternative path to be able to comprehend the broad and exhaustive account of research on the history of the architect, namely by analyzing the discourse of the Pritzker Prize. The analysis of the Pritzker Prize between 1979 and 2024 offers a way to objectify 'the architect' subject in terms of the different design approaches and philosophies based on cultural, educational, and professional background. This article addresses the ideological shift in definitions, identities, and roles from the autonomy of the "Architect" to a team-based, participatory, process-related, and socially integrated view by analyzing the history of the Pritzker Prize.

This study observes a critical transformation as the first main result in the analysis of the Pritzker Prize selections from 1979 to the present. The focus was on evaluating and rewarding architects based on their individual or collective contributions and competencies between 1979 and 2010 however, the emphasis shifted to recognizing architectural practices that have become more independent from the architect and thus more social practices. This shift in the last 14 years from awarding "architects" to "architectures" creates tension with the Pritzker Prize's original institutional stance that it claims and that it promotes at the beginning; the ceremonial events and the corporate medallion. Especially after the third threshold where awards are given to social projects including local solutions, the medallion and institutional claim that still adhere to the trilogy of "firmitas, utilitas, venustas" have lost their validity. (Figure 1) At the point reached in 2024, the competition organizing team needs to question the commodity value of architecture and the meaning of the medallion with what it represents.



When analyzing the demographics of the laureates, it is evident that a significant number of awards have been given to architects of American and European origin. (Table 1) There has been another shift in the distribution of awards out of the West, mostly due to the increase in the number of Central Asian architects receiving awards. The 2024 Pritzker Prize winner was recently announced, and Riken Yamamoto (2024) is the ninth Japanese winner, six of them on the third threshold, demonstrating the change in European dominance in the history of the Pritzker Prize. This shift has brought creative solutions to localized problems to the forefront of architectural debates. Nevertheless, there are likely many architects or architectural works from various geographies whose contributions to the field remain unrecognized due to a lack of awards.

Another significant result is observed when the “network” is analyzed. Awards create networks, just like competitions, between jury members, participants, laureates, and many other actors. Although the analysis of actor-network relations between all members of the Pritzker Prize is not the main focus of this article, the analysis of the jury members revealed a cyclical relationship between the laureates and the jury membership. While having award winners become jury members in subsequent years provides institutional continuity, it limits jury diversity. “The constellation of jurors is generally of similar configurations, from year to year, [...] suggesting a single standard of taste.” (Sorkin 2005, p.108) The longstanding relationships between laureates (whether through working together in an office, a teacher-student dynamic, or the cyclical relationship between the laureate and jury membership) have resulted in a “narrowing network” among different actors within the framework of the Pritzker Prize. Shigeru Ban (2014), for example, joined Arata Isozaki & Associates in 1982 and worked with Isozaki (2019) for a year. (Peltason & Yan, 2017, p.145) In 1997, as a young colleague who was impressed by his architecture, he visited the atelier of Frei Otto (2015) (Peltason & Yan, 2017, p.157) Interestingly, Ban and Otto were honored consecutively in 2014 and 2015. Another example is that Zaha Hadid (2004) studied under Rem Koolhaas (2000) at the Architectural Association and joined OMA after graduating in 1977. They were honored four years apart. The former Japanese laureate Kazuyo Sejima (2010) was on the jury when Isozaki (2019) was honored as the fifth Japanese laureate in the third threshold. All in all, it is also possible to claim that these networks formed in awards such as competitions are spaces where power relations are clustered. Each jury develops a judgment of taste and in this sense adds relatively “new” forces to power relations. Moreover, after each award, the winner's architectures create a visual memory for the next generation. Thus, all these networks, evaluations, and criteria constituted around awards play a significant role in shaping the architectural “appreciation”, “acceptance” and “inquiries” of the architectural community.

This research, focusing only on Pritzker Prizes, can be extended to other international or national competitions as a further study. It is significant to apply similar analyses to other prizes or competitions to reveal the contribution of awards to this field, to the production of architectural knowledge, and to the transformation in architectural thought and practice. These retrospective evaluations would be useful for organizers to examine their history and, if necessary, update the competition's definition, scope, selection committee formation, and evaluation processes.

### Notes

- (1) “The laureate (the year)”, such as Stirling (1981) or Venturi (1991), is used throughout the text to recall the year of the laureate's win. It should not be confused with an in-text reference.
- (2) The in-text references throughout the article about the announcements, jury citations, ceremony videos, and official statements of the laureates based on the official website of the Pritzker Prize, URL1.



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