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“Goethe wasn't definitely talking about Prague when he called architecture 'frozen music' – but he could have been. The city is an ice cube box of melodies, striking chords, making vibrations.”

We feel our personal response wouldn't have been complete without a mention of Prague as a perfect incubator for architecture and as a physical example for the questions that the JKWIS Challenge raises. Our experience in Prague has been both evocative and enriching, with a kaleidoscope of buildings and monuments representing an overview of how the physical form affects the spiritual, material and social facets of the human experience over time.

The spiritual question deals with a more profound understanding of us as individuals and communities and consequently leads to a deeper understanding of our corresponding roles. What this results in, ultimately, is a clash between individuality and homogeneity, as some look at the ideal spiritual condition as establishing a distinct identity, while others look to be part of something bigger and inclusive. In an age of increasing globalization, we have seen value systems & goals between different countries align and have seen this represented in global architecture becoming more homogenous; an evolution from the distinct cultural styles of yore. The advantage of this may be a community that is more tolerant, more intellectually vibrant and inclusive while the disadvantages are several, including the loss of identity in architecture and architecture which has a skewed representation of cultures. We feel that spiritual progress should ideally reach endpoints of common understanding and integration while at the same time treating inherent cultural and spiritual differences on a level playing field. We feel a possible solution to achieve a pragmatic middle ground would be to create accommodation spaces where there is a common platform but importantly an equal opportunity to voice individual expressions and values. E.g. The Czechoslovak Church cemetery open to all denominations and countries with ashes and graves in same format & Global Village space in Dubai.

Our understanding of material progress involves the creation of a sustainable framework to utilize living spaces that can mould the world around us to suit both our identities and our needs. The emphasis is on the term “mould” i.e. the capacity & power to shape living spaces that cater to populist needs to ensure a decent standard of living and also to mould living spaces in a way that leaves an indelible mark on the world around us. Part of what represents this power is the practice of restraint; in that we have reached a level of progress that we realize that development musn't destroy the surrounding environment and deplete our resources but ensure development that can sustain itself to spur progress for hundreds of years to come. Practical steps to achieve this can be a shift to sustainable energy and the creation of smart, integrated cities (e.g. IBM systems).

Social progress can be seen as overlapping with material progress in that it aims to ensure a decent standard of living for as many people as possible. We feel the endpoint in the 21st Century is to create architecture which is as human-centric as possible and must adapt to shifting needs and lifestyle choices. Architecture is more of a mirror to societal paradigms than a platform that causes paradigm shifts. However we want architecture that creates spaces which facilitate positive social change if required, i.e. advocating public parks, incubators and meeting spaces. An important practical step to maintain social progress through architecture is to maintain structured and inclusive public spaces e.g. public housing and specifically to clamp down on the runaway effects of gentrification. Gentrification can improve spaces but need to be tempered to prevent the squeezing out of poor communities and the loss of the authentic fabric of cities. Whatever way this done, e.g. price controls, zoning etc. governments must reach a decision with the best interests of the people in mind.