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The new »Kolizej« in Ljubljana: Issues of the programme

1. Introduction

As »problematic« we can mark a project that the public must face in a very direct and sometimes even unscrupulous way. In the philological sense, problem implies a scientific task and can be equated with question. But the original meaning of the concept »problem« relates to what has been put or even thrown in front of somebody; the original meaning of the word »project« is similar in character. The ruthlessness of the mode (of confronting, deciding, negotiating ...) is within a problematic project dually stressed, not only etymologically, but also actually, *de-facto*.

The problematic of the first awarded project for the new »Kolizej« in Ljubljana, which has been the core of architectural discussion on the Slovene scene in the second half of the year 2004 and first half of the year 2005, hasn't emerged just because of the mode of confrontation, but also brings under question the meaning and justification of the chosen architectural and urban planning proposal on different levels.

Questions evoking most confusion and doubts in the mentioned discussion, which demanded explanations and analysis were:

- problem of location,
- problem of height limits,
- question of conservation/renovation/destruction of the old Kolizej building,
- question of changing planning acts/municipal ordinances to accommodate implementation of the project,
- question of the quality of the project, construction design,
- question of the scale of the program.

At the conclusion of critical articles, media discussions and lectures related to the Novi Kolizej theme, the latter became present in a new, different way. On posters and other promotional materials of Festival Ljubljana, Kolizej (Ltd) appears as the main sponsor, symbolised by a logo representing the shape of the winning project and subtitled: »Kolizej – New Cultural Heart of the City«

This image can be explained as a continuation of the investor's earlier activities; consideration of different emphasis apparently changed but in fact still follows a rigidly pre-planned strategy about the important cultural mission, the role of the modern benefactor.^[1] Considering the general lack of funding for cultural activities (at least such is the public perception), every financial incentive is of course welcome, while we generally regard beneficence, as a characteristic of the renaissance period when artists worked under the auspices of benefactors and thus consequently was related to the flourishing of arts (the architecture being this time considered equal to other artistic fields). The entire New Kolizej project (from the architectural and urban planning competition to festival sponsorship) contains an analogical

tendency to become an inspirer of the rebirth of architecture as well as other arts in Ljubljana.

The mentioned strategy therefore triggers questions related to culture ^[2] and its development in the city, as well as research of cultural issues in urban planning and their influences on the city's public life.

2. Conditions in the competition tender

What were the demands of the competition tender for the architectural – urban planning project of the Kolizej area in Ljubljana related to culture? The competition tender directs planners with the following instructions ^[3]:

- to provide the centre of the city with a new cultural venue, capable of generating new directions in cultural practices;
- The Kolizej development will contain a new hall that is to supplement the present offer of similar venues in the city. The new hall will be designed to enable different possible activities, among them musicals, larger opera performances, ballet and dance, popular entertainers and others. Other functions of this venue should include symphony concerts, conferences and other activities. The hall is also supposed to be a splendid location for the annual Ljubljana festival.
- The capacity of the main hall should be 1.200 seats;
- The auditorium can be designed in one of three shapes: it can follow the traditional »U« shape of opera houses, in a different layout it could be designed as a lyrical theatre and the third concept could follow the design of »Broadway« style theatres;
- The span of cultural programmes: in the broader sense, the subject location gravitates to a relatively limited area of cultural venues in the city centre, such as the National gallery, Opera, National museum, Cultural-congress Centre Cankarjev dom and Drama theatre that give this location even greater importance;
- Symbolic preservation of the old building's original function in the new complex of Kolizej is suggested.

The questions we can derive from these demands are:

- Does the inner city centre of Ljubljana need new cultural venue?
- Does the inner city centre of Ljubljana need a new theatre hall?
- Is planning of an additional cultural program inside the variety of existing cultural programs sensible?
- Is planned symbolic preservation of the original programme of the 19th century Kolizej building in accordance with the conservation doctrine?

3. Supporting arguments

In November 2004 Kolizej d.o.o. (Ltd), the investor of the Kolizej competition, published 300.000 copies of promotion material that among other things presents the chosen project, described it in considerable details and presented opinions of the jury members and several prominent experts. Among others it states ^[4]:

- The Vision of the New Kolizej: which is: »... a modern, attractive and multifunctional complex with emphasis on a multipurpose hall such as Ljubljana hasn't yet seen. This complex should merge five content groups: public-cultural venue for organisation of events, shopping-entertain-

ment part, business part, residential part and logistic and parking areas.«

- Kolizej – new cultural heart of Ljubljana?
Mitja Rotovnik, director of Cankarjev dom: *Kolizej is no threat to Cankarjev dom*: »The idea of the new business building containing a hall similar to the »Gallus Hall« in Cankarjev dom seems visionary, while the most glorious part of the idea is the fact that it will be built by private capital ... the new business centre shall not become another Cankarjev dom since it's going to have only one hall ... There is no possibility that the new hall would endanger us. My vision perceives exclusive complementarity with this hall ...«
- Darko Brlek, director and art director of the Ljubljana Festival: *Finally something will happen in the city*: »Construction of the new complex Kolizej that also includes construction of a new multipurpose hall will surely contribute to revival of the city centre ... construction of the new multipurpose hall would mean new possibilities in the area of culture as well. It would represent an option of staging different kinds of music and music-scene arts (opera and ballet performances, concerts, musicals ...), performing arts and organisation of other events throughout the year.
- What kind of hall are we talking about?
David Staples, Theatre Project Consultants London, about the proposed hall by Neutelings Riedijk Architects: The design follows the concept of a »lyrical theatre«, which was also a proposal in the tender documentation. Such layout makes possible staging a very broad spectre of different types of performances, including opera, musical and dance shows and similar ...
- »Kolizej area – a new generator of the city centre's development?«
During the last decade the old city nucleus has almost become extinct due to the growth of new shopping centres on the city's outskirts that offered a variety of goods and better organisation of traffic. Inside the old city centre only new generators will invoke new growth and living, suitable to the needs of the 21st century. These are active urban spaces designated for events, quality spare time activities, people interaction and satisfying of cultural and commercial needs ...

Questions that follow arguments in favour of the new Kolizej development are:

- Is unifying of different content groups in the new Kolizej complex really such a novelty for the city of Ljubljana?
- What kind of revival will the new Kolizej project apparently bring to the city centre?
- What are the contemporary new generators of development in city centres?

4. Discussion

The conclusions that neither the competition tender nor the projects themselves resulted from serious analysis of urban planning in the city of Ljubljana will be checked through the following questions:

- What is the main characteristic of transformations in European city?
- What is the relation between culture and planning practices?
- What are new meanings and forms of public city spaces?

4.1 Typical transformations in the European city

European cities are making great efforts and battling great troubles in their attempts to revitalise their once vital parts. Apart from this being a novelty within European city, we can observe some characteristics of transformation processes that can be described with the following pairs:

Densening – diminishing Densening of built-up surfaces was characteristic for urban centres while diminishing was typical of the countryside. The new characteristics of city transformation are built-up connections and not densening of the areas.

Innovation – conservation

In traditional/historical cities production of innovations / the number of executed new projects is becoming limited due to increased conservation of historic heritage and remnants in cities.

Nodes – networks

The attractiveness of nodes is replaced by attractiveness of networks. In cities urban projects are executed with an aim to attract the city's inhabitants that have left the city. However former inhabitants don't return in their primary role – as residents – but as consumers.

Complementary – competitive

Formerly cities thrived by subduing their rivals with, for example, better offer. Today their success is based on offering something that cannot be found elsewhere. Contemporary cities are thriving because their characteristics are mutually supplemented within the system of urban networks.

At the same time there emerges a problem, characterised by an attempt to draw the attention of the entire professional community solely to the city centre, rather than devoting discussions, analyses and tendencies to the problem of the city as a whole.

The urban therefore doesn't bear enough or adequate weight in the planning of new developments.

4.2 The relation between planning culture and practise

One of 15 theme groups at the recent AESOP conference, held in July 2005, titled The Dream of a Greater Europe, offered culture, entertaining and spatial planning as a theme of it's discussions.^[5]

The chairman of the theme group, Klaus Kunzman from the Dortmund University, stressed that ever more evidence is emerging proving that the only option for survival of the post-industrial cities and regions in Europe is recognition that their cultural assets have to be viewed as their most precious capital.

What can be counted as such cultural asset? Everything – from artistic, architectural and archaeological heritage to entertainment, as well as enjoyment of rich traditional cuisine, characteristic to particular European region.

Unfortunately culture, in all its diverse dimensions, is a very neglected area in spatial planning. Why is that so? Is it because the cultural dimension is supposedly taken for granted as an obvious part of designing the spatial strategies?

Culture is related to entertainment which has to be, just like the need for shelter, work and recreation, viewed as one of the basic human needs. But in practice we can witness the evolution of everlasting confrontation among different fields of culture: mostly scientific, educational and entertainment.

It is possible that these unsolved antagonisms among different cultural fields are slowing down its intensive inclusion into spatial planning.^[6] The latter unfortunately appears only sporadically: for example when a particular city becomes the European Capital of Culture. The idea was introduced in 1985 by Melina Mercouri, the then Greek minister of Culture, with the aim of connecting Europeans into acquainting themselves with the multitude of different regional cultures.^[7] The city as a whole becomes a cultural project.

At the same time the European Capital of Culture projects, according to the experiences of the Austrian city of Graz in the year 2003, contribute to significant increase in the number of tourists visiting the city. In the case of Graz tourism grew by 35 %.

Cultural aspects act simultaneously on two levels: physical and symbolic. When it comes to designing and deciding, as a part of spatial planning, the designing of physical and symbolic happens at the same time. An illustrative example is a proposed rubbish dump in a shape of pyramids in Rotterdam where because of the city's growth, the disposal of rubbish became an ever greater problem. The Dutch organised a dump on the new land formed at the South-west edge of the Maas river estuary. The quantity of waste was such that they managed to form ranges (regarded as hills considering the local circumstances). Within the relation: nature-designed environment, expressed in the Netherlands through centuries of claiming land from the sea, the idea emerged that the soft, »naturally« shaped land should be reshaped into an »artificially« shaped land by resuming the form of well-known Egyptian pyramids in the outskirts of Gizeh in Egypt. Such a project could assert the city and its setting to the same symbolic level as that of Khufu's (Cheop's), Chephren's and Mykerino's pyramid while Rotterdam would obtain its »historical« monument.

But the *tabula rasa* of the Dutch plains is a very different issue to the numerous layers of Central European historical centres. They therefore demand a significantly different approach to dealing with cultural monuments inside their perimeter.

4.3 New meanings and forms of public urban spaces

The definitions of »public« or »forms of public« are changing. Sloterdijk says that a craving for some new centres of public is emerging that are »catalysts of balanced excitement«.

Hubeli even thinks that the interchange in the subject of public spaces is one of the two most important themes in both architecture and urbanism, since: (1) with the urbanisation of agglomerations there are gradually appearing completely new forms of public spaces; (2) the public is affected by occurrences like globalisation, telecommunications, medialisation, which all create virtual public spaces.

Within new forms of public spaces we can observe the phenomena of differentiation of social homogeneity. The latter

unfolds in a subtle, almost invisible fashion. This division separates different classes of consumers from different types of consumption.

But public spaces of shopping malls are not the only ones displaying the tendency towards such definition. The same applies to architectural exclusivity in old city centres or almost ghettoised centres used as gathering points by younger generations. Apart from differentiation we can also observe further similarity between shopping and cultural centres; the first, i.e. urban public space, is used by inhabitants from morning until evening, the second mostly in the evening. But both leave behind the ghost town: the city of temporary users (including tourists).

On the other hand, citizens, inhabitants residing in the city, are using public space continuously, more or less constantly throughout the day – these users are truly the real generators of the city centre. City centres are becoming extinct not only because their programmes are moving out but because »The public« is the venue of endless possibilities and coincidences. Virtual space has no shape and can follow no shape.

Public is primarily marked as the opposite of private. Quality public spaces are the result of achieved balance between public and private interests. In certain social orders public interests or the relation and balance between public and private interests was coerced (in favour of the public interest). Transformation of the social order (from socialism to capitalism) brings change not only to relations, but also to the process of achieving the balance. This process is usually called negotiation and within a frame of these negotiations the public interest should be the very first to appear or be defined. At the same time it is necessary to ensure: 1) that there is a negotiation area where public interests can be presented but also private interest confronted with the public one and 2) different ways of negotiating can be developed.

A quality public sphere is prerequisite for good (could also be sizeable) spatial and economical development. It's simple: people will prefer to spend their spare time in places that are pleasant, functional, easily approachable, etc.

5. Conclusion

In the time of its construction Kolizej was built outside the city centre. Its construction represents the beginning of urbanisation of the eastern part of the former city. It was constructed for the needs of soldiers (officers) stationed in Ljubljana. At that time the city was obliged to provide residences for them and in most cases they were organised in private houses. To ensure a sufficient number of military quarters, the Municipality of Ljubljana decided to build Kolizej. At the same time Kolizej became the focus of social life in the city.

Regarding programmes, the inner city centre, where Kolizej stands today and where the New Kolizej project is perceived, is congested with so-called cultural programmes. Besides, the proposed combination of interest groups isn't unique and therefore not as interesting as it should be, if it is to justify the role of the attractor (bait): different contents groups are already united in the Republic Square area. Can we plan two centres with such similar programs so close to each other? The characteristics of modern transformation in European cities don't support such considerations.

There are quite a few options how to arrange programs differently:

- an introduction of complementary programmes or complementary combinations of programmes – ones that cannot be found in the inner city centre;
- transfer of the tendered programme to another location for the purpose of creating a new centre or enhancing the role of another centre where a new combination of programmes is possible;
- bigger emphasis on residential functions of the complex: the city centre will be revived if new apartments rather than offices are built on this location that could utilise the city 24 hours a day (and not only between 8 am and 4 pm). Then again, is the centre of Ljubljana really dead?
- the preservation of the original programme, not in the figurative but rather literary sense – living history.

The symbol and centre of public (and social) life and of public spaces in Ljubljana is represented by the area of Prešeren Square and Triple Bridge (Tromostovje). At the same time there are appearing new forms of public life and public spaces or they are formed within the dialogue between the described city centre and an area on its outskirts, the so-called BTC City, which was developed on the grounds of former public warehouses.

With programmes including shopping malls, business and entertainment areas and even an attempt to create a cultural venue (there is also a theatre), BTC City is an antipode to Prešeren Square.

BTC City with its programme combination and distance from the inner city centre of Ljubljana manages to create its own identity, which is best proven by numbers: the number of visitors is constantly increasing, since 2003 BTC City is annually visited by over 18 million people.

In Ljubljana the issue of attraction or the Bilbao effect (the impact that a particular architectural object is having on the city's development), has already (almost) happened. True, BTC City hasn't got its Frank Ghery, but it has badly beaten Bilbao in numbers of visitors: there the annual figure reaches only 1.300.000 people.

BTC City is characteristic in its perfection of social segregation (proven among other things by the title of an article by Gorazd Suhadolnik in the daily newspaper Delo, dated 23. April 2005: BuTeC CITY (Idiot City). Among other he states: »I know people that will not go to Kolosej (a multiplex cinema in BTC City) out of principle«. Is it because there one can only find stupid and limited people? Is it because people of principles are positioned higher on the social scale, than the idiots converging in BTC?

A similar principle is expressed in expert evaluations of the appearance of shopping malls and other centres on the outskirts of Ljubljana. Despite these standpoints some of these have already overtaken the inner city of Ljubljana in some of the factors. Their characteristics and offer surely add to the characteristics and offer of the Ljubljana inner city centre.

The program concept of the development Kolizej – the new cultural heart of Ljubljana has been entangled in the mesh of expert negligence for spatial problems. If at all, then the new Kolizej should be, speaking metaphorically, situated somewhere between Tromostovje and Atlantis (water park

facility in BTC). Or analogically: as the old Kolizej, the former centre of social life was located on the city's outskirts, today Kolizej, the New Cultural Heart of the City with commissioned programmes, can function successfully only on the new outskirts or within a new centre.

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Notes:

- [1] The Slovene word for benefactor (used in the original text) is *mecen* – it denotes a person that voluntarily support artists – this sort of sponsorship got its name after the ancient Roman literary benefactor Gaius Cillinius Maecent
- [2] Culture can be explained simultaneously as behaviour (pertaining to *Homo sapiens* alone) and material objects (as an integral part of his acting, meaning: language, ideas, beliefs, habits, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, sermons, etc.). Cultural questions in urbanism are related to footnote 5.
- [3] Published in English in the original competition
- [4] All quotations were published in a three-page colour supplement in A3 format and titled *Kolizej – the New Cultural Heart of Ljubljana*. The contents include:
 - (1) *Kolizej through time*
 - (2) *New generator of the city centre's development*
 - (3) *The image of the new Kolizej*
 - (4) *Visions of the new Kolizej*
 - (5) *The choice of the best project*
- [5] Contributions represented at the conference belong to three categories and deal with three different spaces: Cultural spaces; contributions among other deal with the role of culture in urban and regional development strategies; in urban revitalisation; importance of culture in designing cities and regions; competition of cities to become the »European Capital of Culture«. Entertainment spaces; entertainment as one of the basic human needs, social and economical participation of the entertainment areas in the cities, entertainment as a tourism concept: the 24-hour city, the city at night; can we plan entertainment?; the culture of events and cultural lifestyles; Creative spaces; creative spaces: the role of cultural industry in local and regional economy; cultural industries as an important element of local economical development strategies.
- [6] Gaps between particular fields are so wide that some experts dealing with culture consider that informing the public about scientific results in its pertaining area actually isn't their performers job at all, let alone to participate themselves in the educational and entertainment parts of their profession.
- [7] The designation »European Capital of Culture« helps to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share and facilitates greater mutual acquaintance between the European Union's citizens.

Illustrations:

Figure 1: *Poster for the Ljubljana Festival*

Figure 2: *Logotype of Kolizej the new cultural heart of Ljubljana*

Figure 3: *Project of the pyramid-shaped garbage dump in Rotterdam (workshop Coast Wise Europe, 1996).*

Figure 4: *The goods and retail centre BTC in the new city centre of Ljubljana?*

For sources and literature, turn to page 20.