

BEIRUT REPORT

The competition has the aim of planning a museum that might be an emblem for Beirut's artistic and cultural world, besides a symbolic and representative building able to host all the necessary activities to promote culture and art in Beirut, which might collect all the permanent and the temporary exhibitions of the local and the international artists.

So with our project, we've tried to meet the requirements expressly asked by the competition announcement, but at the same time, paying a particular attention to the relationship that the landscape has with its surroundings in this area.

The plan wants to, for its symbolic valence its flexibility and quality of the spaces it represents, define a place, thanks to a strong sense of characterization, which is able to host many activities. There are no specific functions that give this new complex an identity value, the building can't be recognized as a museum-building, neither a workshop-building nor an informative point; it is the system in itself to work as an *isotropic medium* which is able to modify, suggesting alternative ways of the right to use.

The building wants to promote the knowledge of the Arabic world giving a place where everybody can exchange information about arts, sciences and culture, this place has been thought to offer an important public place, providing apart from the offices some exhibition spaces, dedicated to special events, theatre spaces for education and research. A building that is not just a cultural centre or a place for pieces of art to be shown, but even a drive to promote the art and the culture.

The project points out a precise choice of cultural nature: in the very same place the artistic production and the entertainment join together; a whole of symbolic meanings which express themselves in the location and in the architecture, theatre, music, entertainment and direct production of the artistic events, all of them are joined together into a building that will get a "monument" for the promotion of regional and international cultural activities.

The analysis of the aims to which the building we're talking about has to meet leads the planning to the creation of a new containing space that allows the users not to stop just to a cultural need, but that stimulates them to a cognitive approach that encloses many disciplines. The whole idea of the project is to create a new building in order to support the cultural meeting in a broad sense, and its subsequent social relationships, besides to stimulate an ongoing formative process for the users.

THE PROJECT

The project idea consists of realizing a "cultural melting-pot" in order to gather many activities into a single complex, a sort of container of functions which are necessary to make what we call "three services spaces" concrete (leisure and cultural sociability/education/permanent education). The place is meant to be as a continuum to be lived and used with the freedom of the curious and

attentive user, who shares the functional and logic interdependence of the different environmental units. The new body becomes a multimedia library which is able to satisfy, thanks to the straight that a spatial and fluid organization gave to it, all the different needs of the users. The information, the education but also the entertainment, all of them are interpreted as a flow that pervades the building and allows the immediate movement. This idea of movement of the services of the structure inspires the planning of the typological system: interdependent communicating functional levels, the way the “knowledge pots” and the cultural sociability are.

A special importance has to be given to a planning level, besides the choice and the definition of the kind of activity that can be done inside the building, even to the interaction that there might be between them and the surplus in terms of participation to each one of them, that can be generated by the simultaneous presence of more activities in the same building. In these terms one of the main concepts of our proposal as well as the big challenge related to the functional organization consists of making the functional autonomy live together with a strong programmatic nucleus interconnection among the same, a special and visual one, in a way to make the constant shift from one to the other, not only natural but even inviting.

The new structure has been planned to be a cultural centre to draw people from all over the country in order to promote the aspiration of the town. An effective structure which might be able to host a range of different performances, such as exhibitions, theatre, music etc.

Therefore, the House of the culture/participation/education and entertainment puts itself as a civic centre and a complete and complex attraction pole that has to express its identity also through an emblematic recognizability. This last one is straightened by the presence, from far away, of massive and impenetrable volumes, in antithesis with the below fragile transparency, in fact the plan, whose perception reminds to an idea of stateliness, is composed of two bodies that look like two monoliths, architecturally characterized by a big overhung. The plot, where the plan is set, puts itself into an old productive context which now is changing, so the plan has to face the current pre-existing situation of a new planning and it has to put itself as a new body without being in conflict with the current situation.

So, we’ve tried to develop the architectural research towards a less usual direction, which might go beyond the simple aggregation of the conventional spaces.

Our first studies were based on the aggregation of different rectangular volumes on the grounds of the functional and distributive requirements: a foyer, a conference hall, exhibition spaces for the permanent exhibitions, spaces upstairs for the temporary exhibitions etc..

Once gained a better distribution of the spaces, the architectural choice has been addressed to the creation of two external curvilinear walls that wrap the functions and transform the orthogonal forms into a system of organic spaces. From the outside, the curvilinear walls are not continuous between them, by they are made of two organic surfaces that dynamically fork just in a point on the covering and open on the two openings. This detachment of the surfaces favours the creation

of a roof light on the covering and of glass windows for the lighting of the halls and the distribution spaces.

The building wants to be, in this project, a dynamic and adaptable space that might host different functions and that might stimulate the users to its use. Moreover it constitutes a continuous incentive to the learning and the continuation of our educational path, favouring the social relationships both cultural and accidental and putting itself as a place of the culture and of the people.

The particular thing of the plan is the structural system. Leaving the inner space clear from the pillars, it is organized as a single open place characterized by the presence of hanging volumes destined to host halls, audition halls, theatre halls.

From a structural point of view, these volumes are literally hung with suitable tie-beams hooked to the beams of the floor, this allows the space intended for various exhibitions and events to be completely clear.

The aesthetic redevelopment of the building is committed to a covering system: a metal web that covers the glazed façades, creating a game of lights, which intensifies the lighting of the structure.

In the morning, the bodies have an opaque reflection, but at night they gain a bigger visibility, it follows an interesting game of transparencies.

The external skin made of a metal web, besides having a decorative role, which is placed behind the wall with broad glass windows, contributes to the shading from the sun light.

The building covering, besides separating the outside from the inside, serves as an interface between the building and the urban environment. Its main functions consist of protecting the building from the weather (cold, warm, rain, wind) defining the volumes and creating a private sphere, but as a part of the building, mainly exposed to the public, its external colour and finishing play a critical role in to the visual aspect. The choice of using a metal web as an external covering's been suggested by the need of not to create a closed wing.

So we've decided to focus the architectural and the constituent part aspect on the covering that wraps the whole building. The skin made of a metal web, has its own decorative function since it waters down and softens the stiffness of the project.

As far as the inner distribution of the space is concerned we've tried to solve the partition of the areas according to the competition's announcement requirements. That's to say distributing the different areas of the building allowing an easy location for the users of the different areas of great interest.

In both the bodies, the minimum requirements for spaces of the different areas have been totally met and they have been divided in a functional way, in order that the required activities are immediately recognized.

The higher body at the ground floor has a space for the temporary and permanent exhibitions, upstairs, there are an auditorium, projection rooms besides services spaces, study and research rooms.

At the covering level, a theatre has been made out with terraces that can be used for the theatre performances or for open air music concerts. The lower body, has a library, an audio/video room, administration offices, mainly workshops and study rooms, all of them provided with all the necessary appliances and equipments, useful to the development and the promoting of the different cultural activities. Both the buildings have a more distinct and unmistakable identity and they develop a dialogue between them becoming part of the context in an harmonious way.