

Cultural Centre Holesovice

Less is More

Prague faces extensive car usage, it has neglected pedestrians and cyclists and there are several disconnected urban tissues. To summarize; the city centre is clogged by both cars and people. Prague needs to densify, it needs to create transport hubs for easy interchange between different types of public transportation, create connections between disconnected urban tissues and divide instead of cluster. It would be beneficial for both city centre and surrounding neighbourhoods if the (tourist)pressure on the city centre would be spread out over the city more equally.

My project location is located on the northern part of the city. There is a huge undeveloped plot in between two existing neighbourhoods (Letná and Holesovice). The area is upcoming, has a lot of cultural activities and is well known for its creative residents. The undeveloped plot ensures unpopularity and uncontrollability of the space. For the time being the surrounding neighbourhoods do not really function according to their full potential. That's why I decided it was best to transform this area into a new inviting, binding and vital new part of Prague, focussing on affordable housing for starters, social housing and mid-income households. The new residential area will transform the area radically. A place for people to wander, tempting them to experience and discover for themselves. A green environment with a clear hierarchy in public spaces and amenities. In this way, the northern part of Prague finally becomes part of the city.

I have chosen to design a new culture hub. It houses a large theatre, a library, a luxurious restaurant/skybar, a bar/cafe and it has a direct connection with the existing Vltavska metro line.

The building is located in a park-like environment and 'stands' alone; a solitary building. My initial idea was to make a 'collage' of all the functions and make clear distinctions. In this way each program would have its own character and identity within a specific composition that seemed appropriate to me. It would be easily readable from the outside. However by doing so, the building started to disintegrate. After several tutorial sessions I decided it was best to make one strong architectural form. The form arose after long modelling-/sketch sessions. After P3 I got some feedback that I needed to reshape the form a little. It led to an improved form and a better distinction between the theatre and library.

Because of its solitude the building is an omnidirectional building. I decided it was best to keep the entire ground floor open as much as possible and create an urban plaza within the building. A square which can be accessed from every side of the building, a smooth transition between inside and outside. A place to meet people, to house events, to use as a passage or to drink a cup of coffee. It is the heart of the building: the 'social living room' of the neighbourhood where most interaction takes place.

To create this inviting urban square on the ground level I decided to lift the building and put it on a large glass pedestal, a glass plinth. This way I ensure a clear division between public and private which makes the building easy to understand. The glass plinth opens up the building on eye level and it becomes an open, multiple use, transparent space. The building becomes a large monolithic shape hovering this transparent plinth, characterized by large canopies to emphasize entrances.

The existing Vltavska metro line is directly connected with the building. Because of this I decided to create two different routes to ensure controllability of the urban plaza and create a clear hierarchy, thus providing the visitors a sequence of spaces rather than one large undefined space. The main route is on ground level and consists of the urban square with access to the library, theatre, restaurant and cafe. The secondary route is located on the -1 level and will connect the metro exit and entrance with the building. It also works on an urban scale as it connects the park located on the northern part and the sport and public transport facilities on the southern side. The passage is connected with the urban square by escalators and stairs

The theatre is the most prominent function in the building. It is a free form which suggests movement and direction. Directly above the passage I decided to create a large void with skylights to create a light and comfortable interior space. All this, in combination with height differences in the plot, led to the choice of making a sloped glass plinth. It strengthens and intensifies the gesture of opening up the building vertically alongside the passage.

Once you enter the building on ground level you will immediately notice the theatre above your head. Large concrete columns ensure the buildings stability and support a vast installation floor with all the technical aspects of the building. The theatre is suspended from this steel construction and floats freely in the middle building. I think the shape of the theatre needs some extra attention as it doesn't really correspond with the architectural language used throughout the building. I am hoping to get some feedback on this matter during p4.

Prague is well known for its rich façade decorations and interiors. Both are mainly characterized by a wide variety of natural stones. I have chosen to use local products: a light sandstone (Horický Pískovec) for the main monolithic shape and a gray slate (Bridlice Zelezný Brod) for the materialisation below the plinth (-1 level). As mentioned earlier the glass plinth is completely transparent and will be very minimalist, with glass fins and invisible profiles. This intensifies the transparent character.

The facade should, at its core, be a monolithic shape with a couple well placed perforations. The openings fit in a certain grid (500x1000) and have a fixed ratio (1:2). The perforations are either windows, skylights or terraces. They differ in size and depth but they all correspond. Due to the sloped roof the building truly has a fifth façade, with the same material as the other facades.

I realised during the design that I tend to overstep. I think I need to learn to kill my darlings during the design process. I want too much which almost every time has a big impact on the design. "Less is more" is a statement which really applies to me; reduce rather than add. This leads to stronger and better architecture.

This *Less is more* theme has had an impact on the form and floorplan. The most important remark I got was that the building started to disintegrate every time I wanted to add a new idea. When it was time to develop the façade I tried to keep it as simple (with the architectural goal in mind) as possible. I ended up with a clean and readable façade with a clear hierarchy. A new attractive part of the city with an architectural icon as the face of the new district.