Contextual government quarter development, Budapest, Hungary

Project data

Type of project: Architecture (admin/business)
Estimated start of construction: December 2008

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Comment of the Holcim Awards jury Europe

The outstanding highlight of this project is its comprehensive approach to urban renewal. The initial driver of the project was the need for additional space to accommodate government administrative departments in the heart of Budapest. Instead of just fulfilling this prime function by another large office complex, the project incorporates the revitalization of the adjacent historic Teréz quarter consisting mainly of housing and small businesses as well as the creation of additional public functions and services. Thanks to the upgrading of a beautiful old railway station that had been neglected for many years. In addition, a sustainable energy concept will be applied to the new administration buildings.

Due to this integral development of a previously rather disregarded urban area a win-win situation will be created: on the one hand the new office spaces will be built according to the specific expectations of the government and the users, and on the other hand most of the inhabitants of this quarter will stay in their former but upgraded living environment and will benefit from access to additional recreational facilities. Overall, the project demonstrates in a convincing manner how urban renewal should be tackled in order to realize substantial contributions to the sustainable development of degraded urban areas.

Project description by author

Four quarters make a whole: the project winning the international competition for a complex to house eleven ministries of the Hungarian government applies environmental, functionally-conscious architectural and technical solutions. Moreover, it presents a combined approach to three basic problems of its urban context: the rehabilitation of an historic district, the integration of the once peripheral central railways, and the fine-tuning of an adventitiously-developed downtown main square through deconstruction. The proposed design was based on the conviction that the principle of operable systems should be followed for both the architecture and its environment redefined by the construction. The building complex of the government district is only one quarter; it will only become a whole after reworking the other three.

Government quarter: the (planned) construction converts one quarter; it will only become a whole after reworking the other three.

Railroad to crossroad to green-road: The lowering of the railway line and one of the three main railway stations of the capital creates a street level connection of the two districts all along the new construction project. Perpendicular to these new connections and between the bordering government district, buildings, a spatial sequence of a tri-sector park-piazza-park has been designed. The downtown boulevard will be directly connected through recreational traffic to the city’s highest-quality green area and leisure destinations with the Eiffel Hall being the point of departure and arrival.

A sustainable energy concept is applied to the whole government building. Heat pumps meet 90% of heating and 50% of cooling energy needs. The remaining portion of cooling is provided by water from the Danube. Wall heating and cooling is combined with extreme thermal insulation using innovative materials. Direct heat impact is eliminated by plants on the façade and full shading of the windows, reducing cooling needs. Natural light drastically reduces electricity consumption. By using green electricity, the building fulfills zero emission requirements. Warm water comes from solar vacuum tubes and photovoltaic panels. Rainwater is collected, a split wastewater management and water saving appliances are used. Selective waste management is carried out on the spot.

The program will entirely transform a very poorly-functioning urban scene. It could prove to be paradigmatic by proposing radical, progressive solutions and introducing new qualities in a society lacking awareness and insight. Urban renewal triggered by a type of development usually known to be arrogant. The work is based on a profound analysis of the situation and a highly complex approach.

Economic performance and compatibility

The whole project is about cutting costs of governmental work by bringing together the offices and providing better infrastructure. The relatively high cost of construction is balanced by lower-cost operation and sustainable economical infrastructure. The relatively high cost of construction is balanced by lower-cost operation and sustainable economical infrastructure. The relatively high cost of construction is balanced by lower-cost operation and sustainable economical infrastructure.

Contextual and aesthetic impact

Contextual concerns play a major role in the project. Exploiting the energy coming from the emergence of such a large and important building, an extensive urban revitalization is planned in order to prepare for the inevitable changes coming. The governmental building introduces a new aesthetic quality in Budapest and is set into a framework of three equally radical interventions: covering the railways with a huge public park, reconstituting the square in front of the station and renewing a 25-block urban area across the street from the new building. Urban structure is regarded here as a mechanism that has to work properly and fulfill the needs of inhabitants. Hence the first three stories of the building contain public functions and are subsequently highly-accessible to the public and open for walkthrough.

Relevance to target issues by author

Quantum change and transferability

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Ethical standards and social equity

Our goal was to turn a symbol of power into an exemplary model of common sense, responsibility and sustainability.

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