

## **Culture as a Factor of Urban Renovation**

The MuseumsQuartier in Vienna.

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**Extended Abstract**

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#### Abstract

The idea of grouping, in the same area, different spaces for cultural purposes is nothing new. In fact, this architectural ensemble was first built in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century b.C and has been discontinuously reinterpreted throughout the years. Despite the persistence of the concept, it took several changes in museum architecture as well as the way it relates to the city, to finally establish the cultural cluster as a building type within the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Starting from a successful intervention – the MuseumsQuartier, in Vienna – this essay develops an analysis of this architectural concept supported by other museum projects of the same type. By completing the study with previous and subsequent situations along with their urban impacts, it gives way to a reflection on the future of cultural clusters as well as the key aspects of their implementation.

**Key words:** MuseumsQuartier, museum architecture, cultural cluster, urban renewal, Vienna

#### Museums as Urban Complexes

The introduction of art in the private sector in Ancient Rome led to the eradication of the museums, which was extended to the Middle Ages. The Renaissance introduced changes in the status quo, re-inflaming an interest in art. The galleries designed in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries were crucial to the establishment of art-dedicated spaces that started occupying palaces, democratically open to the city since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the first projects were developed that intended the transformation of a specific area of the city through concentration of several museums. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, museum architecture was the subject of a worldwide reflection, leading the way to several concepts that followed the major architectural trends of the same period. The museum boom - which started in the 1980's - gave rise to a museum concentration in the city that gradually formed important cultural areas<sup>1</sup>. The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was characterised by this museum density, which suggests the concept of clustering.

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<sup>1</sup> Mila Nikolić – *Ciudad de Museos. Clústeres de museos en la ciudad contemporánea*. Barcelona: Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, 2010, p. 13

The case studies selection aimed to analyse different situations that embodied the idea of cultural clustering. Take the Museum Island in Berlin, the Museum Square in Amsterdam, the Art Walk in Madrid and the Fort Worth Cultural District in Texas.

The Museum Island in Berlin is born from a plan developed in 19<sup>th</sup> century. The plan attempted to create a cultural area for the city, taking advantage of the natural boundaries established by the Spree River. Apart from the benefits achieved by the presence of five important museums, the influence in terms of urban renewal went beyond the island physical boundaries, strengthening the urban fabric and the idea of museum aggregation.

Still in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some museums were constructed around an urban square, in Amsterdam, contributing to the consolidation of a new area. The Museumplein became not only an important cultural centre of the city, but also an important link between the urban centre and the later established residential areas.

Although the “Paseo del Arte” in Madrid was only presented as a group in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it was formed through the adaptation of three existing buildings designed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We should consider the fact that this intervention was developed through spaces already incorporated into the urban fabric, leading to urban transformations that covered a considerable area of the city.

On the other side of the Atlantic, similar urban intervention strategies emerged. The Fort Worth Cultural District in Texas was initiated in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But, despite its exceptional architecture, it did not meet the expected urban transformations.

### **The MuseumsQuartier**

The MuseumsQuartier is a cultural complex situated in Vienna's historical centre, in Austria. Although the history of the lot began with the construction of the baroque stables in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most of its remaining spaces were built during the following decades. Soon after the death of its original architect, Fischer von Erlach, in 1723, this peripheral area was forgotten and remained incomplete. It was only during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the Napoleonic wars and the demolition of the city fortifications<sup>2</sup>, that the baroque stables were again recognized as an important area, and a major part of the original plans was constructed in a Neo-Baroque style. Between the two World Wars a few more additions were made to the quarter and, after they were finished, the last spaces of the baroque stables were built.

During the 1980's, several proposals for new uses of the space were made, which subsequently created a cultural cluster, which supported an urban renewal strategy<sup>3</sup>.

An architecture competition, named “Concept for a new Structuring of the Federal Museums”

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<sup>2</sup> See: The treaty of Vienna, 14 October, 1809. Disponível em: [www.napoleon.org](http://www.napoleon.org) [14-08-2014]

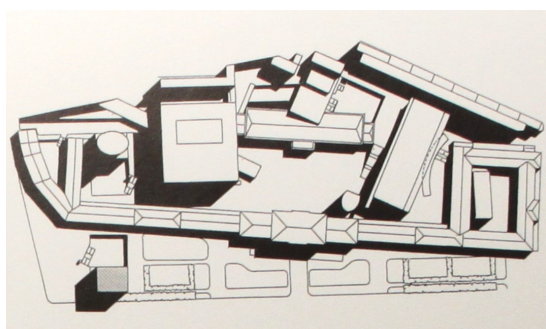
<sup>3</sup> See: Monika de Frantz – “From Cultural Regeneration to Discursive Governance: Constructing the Flagship of the ‘Museumsquartier Vienna’ as a Plural Symbol of Change” International Journal of Urban and Regional Research. Volume 29.1. 2005, p. 54

started in 1986. It was divided in two phases and was completed in 1990 with the selection of the Ortner & Ortner 's project. The design was then developed for several years and its construction was only finished in 2001. The concept created by the architects was compared to a cultural acropolis - "In urban terms this is a reference to a morphological model characterised on the one hand by the clear definition of independent built elements and on the other by the careful organisation of sensually perceptible cross-references between these elements"<sup>4</sup>

The successive changes in the architecture and functional program, the criticism directed to the new buildings, the recovery of historic spaces, the connections with the city and the architectural aspects of museum design were solved and harmonized creating a cultural area for the city.



1. MuseumsQuartier aerial view



2. Conceptual image developed by Ortner & Ortner

Currently the MuseumsQuartier is composed of historic and contemporary architecture. The three biggest institutions on the site (the Leopold Museum, the Mumok and the Kunsthalles), are housed in the new buildings designed by Ortner & Ortner, and despite their distinct appearances, they create an interesting dialogue with each other, as well as with the older constructions. The smaller institutions were located into the baroque stables spaces, after the renovation developed by Manfred Wehdorn, and several interior design projects by different architects.



3. Mumok



4. Kunsthalles



5. Leopold Museum

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<sup>4</sup> Ortner & Ortner, in Matthias Boeckl (ed) – MuseumsQuartier Wien – Die Architektur / The Architecture, Architecture Aktuell, Volume 3, Viena, Outubro de 2001, p. 26

Apart from the architectural aspects, which influenced the project success, it was crucial to understand the other characteristics that supported the cultural initiative. The structural organization adopted by the MuseumsQuartier is based on a land ownership model with a limited company – the MuseumsQuartier Developing and Operating Company<sup>5</sup>, which rents spaces to all the cultural organizations - including the Leopold Museum and the Mumok. The smaller institutions were grouped under the name of Quartier21 – a support structure that also rents smaller spaces and has its own cultural program focused on international synergies.

There is a competitive environment in the quarter, prompted by the independence of the institutions, regarded as healthy and propitious to the intended diversity. In fact, the MuseumsQuartier houses a wide range of activities devoted to all kinds of visitors, maintaining the cultural cluster alive throughout the whole year. However, the lack of collaboration between the different initiatives, leads to over-programming issues from time to time.

Like the previous examples, this intervention was also developed as an urban renewal strategy for this area of the city. In fact, the MuseumsQuartier was able to link the imperial residence area and its museums with the winding streets of the Neubau suburban area. Besides this connective role, the MuseumsQuartier also generated a sense of identity for Vienna in a creative environment for cultural activities.

## **After the MuseumsQuartier**

### International Context

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has been establishing this architectural museum concept as well as its benefits in terms of urban renewal. The growing of number of cultural institutions has empowered the advantages taken from the verified density.

Research made on the cultural cluster has proved a persistency of museum aggregation in different environments worldwide. One of the most famous examples of cultural concentration and urban renewal was the transformation triggered by the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, designed by Frank Gehry, in 1997. Side by side with the transformation of the city into a touristic destination through the improvement of existing museums and creation of other cultural venues, these projects were also supported by an urban intervention focused on riverfronts. This proved to be crucial in the Bilbao urban renewal process.

Another important example in Europe is Le Centquatre, in Paris. Through the transformation of an old slaughterhouse, the Centquatre created a cultural cluster capable of revitalizing an area of the city. In fact, the project ended up attracting shops, ateliers and other urban activities that

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<sup>5</sup> See: Simon Roodhouse – *Cultural Quarters. Principles and Practice*. Bristol: Intellect, 2010, p. 119

converted the space in a small neighbourhood<sup>6</sup>.

Outside the European territory, the implementation of cultural clusters as an urban renewal strategy has also evolved. One of many examples is the Geelong Cultural Precinct, in Australia, developed by David Lock Associates. The project focused on linking existing cultural institutions, with more than 100 years, with new spaces that have been established later<sup>7</sup>.

The variety of cultural clustering situations indicates the concept versatility, as well as its persistence and permanent updating. The multiplication of examples, all over the world, makes the reflection about its future and key aspects for its success extremely relevant.

## Portugal

Just like its foreign partners, Portugal has concentrated a considerable amount of institutions in some areas of the bigger cities. Portuguese museum architecture was developed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it gave birth to important cultural institutions nationwide.

Close to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a series of museums were developed aiming an international relevance. One of the results of this period is the Belem Cultural Centre (Centro Cultural de Belém - CCB), designed by Vittorio Gregotti and Manuel Salgado. Located in Lisbon iconic waterfront, the building contributed significantly to the concentration of cultural and touristic attractions in the area. It helped them function as a whole. The new CCB director<sup>8</sup> and the Portuguese Museum Association (Associação Portuguesa de Museologia - APOM) director have already expressed this intention, claiming that smaller institutions should be able to benefit from their proximity to major cultural spaces<sup>9</sup>.

Still in Lisbon, other initiatives as the "Art and Science Walks" (Passeios com Arte e Ciência) and the "Art Neighbourhood" (Bairro das Artes) have been taking advantage from the concentration of cultural spaces in different areas of the city making this international trend visible in the Portuguese capital.

In Oporto, the concentration of museums and galleries around the street Miguel Bombarda has also created an example of cultural cluster. As one of the most dynamic areas of the city, these initiatives have been requesting an urban intervention that supports and optimizes this area potential for several years.

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<sup>6</sup> Nuno Grande - *MUSEUMANIA. Museus de Hoje, Modelos de Ontem* Porto: Fundação de Serralves/Jornal Público, 2009, p. 132

<sup>7</sup> Ver: "Geelong Cultural Precinct Strategy" Disponível em: [www.dlaaust.com](http://www.dlaaust.com) [28-09-2014]

<sup>8</sup> António Lamas was announced new Belém Cultural Centre director in September 2014. See: "António Lamas vai ser o novo presidente do Centro Cultural de Belém – oficial", 17-09-2014. Available in: <http://visao.sapo.pt/antonio-lamas-vai-ser-o-novo-presidente-do-centro-cultural-de-belem-oficial=f795715#ixzz3EKUBZtOA> [20-09-2014]

<sup>9</sup> João Neto in "Museus Gratuitos?" Interview with Porto, 16/10/2011 Available in: <http://www.pportodosmuseus.pt/2011/10/16/museus-gratuitos-pporto-ouviu-joao-neto-presidente-da-apom/> [10-09-2014]

## Conclusions

As was stated in the beginning of this article, the idea of grouping different cultural institutions in the same area is nothing new. However, the ways they are embodied in the city are very different as are the effects of their implementation in the urban fabric.

Although the analysed case studies before MuseumsQuartier presented a clear success on the advantages taken from the proximity between institutions; in urban renewal their impacts were quite different.

Take the case of the Museum Island in Berlin. Although it is clearly recognized as an important museum area in the city, its physical boundaries determined by the Spree River ended up affecting the extension of the cultural complex. The Museumplein museums in Amsterdam, though quite limited by the square, were able to mingle with the rest of the city, giving new institutions an opportunity to be part of the cluster. From the urban integration point of view, the "Art Walk" in Madrid was, without a doubt, the most effective. Because a big part of the institutions were already embodied in the urban fabric, it became easier for other institutions to aggregate to the existing ones. Apart from the different origins of different buildings, the urban intervention developed by Álvaro Siza that articulated the areas between museums and potentiated their extension stands out. In the Fort Worth Cultural District, the lack of an urban strategy that supported the group of museums and connected it to the rest of the city affected its true potential originating a typical North American suburban area around the complex.

The detailed analysis of the MuseumsQuartier made it possible to identify more than the urban aspects already described, also other characteristics that determined their success. The location of the baroque stables next to the city fortifications was, from the beginning, a structural position in terms of urban development. Even though the quality of the museum architecture determined the cluster success, the economic and programmatic model that supported the cultural initiative proved to be equally important.

As it was already mentioned, the geographic positioning of the MuseumsQuartier was destined to be an important link between the city centre and the residential areas behind it. However, an urban intervention capable of optimizing the urban effects of the cultural group should be developed. For example the Mariahilfer Strasse, right next to the MuseumsQuartier should be redesigned, making it possible to recognize the Schönbrunn Palace as another element of this big historical and cultural area of the city.

The recent developments of museum clusters were able to demonstrate that this building type is still being developed and the number of interpretations is almost infinite. In fact, the situations that aim to connect a number of cultural spaces have been multiplying around the world, making it relevant to reflect on what are the key aspects that influence their success.

First, there should be a diversity of contents, meaning that the group of institutions should be

directed to different publics, capable of attracting to the same area a variety of visitors. The second crucial aspect is the quality of public space that allows the visitor to stay in the area after the museum visit. Thirdly, the importance of the rhythm through which the cultural attractions appear in the city - which is deeply related to the fourth and last characteristic - the routes that connect the institutions and make it possible to manage the rhythm and link the cluster with rest of the city.

The study has, above all, proved the importance of the urban aspects on cultural project structuring. The success of the association of cultural and urban planning in the city announces the museum development direction that might transform the famous "Bilbao effect" into the "museum cluster effect".