The Search for 'Kulturpalast'
in the Historic Core of Dresden, Germany

by
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ABSTRACT

The Kulturpalast is located in the middle of Dresden’s historic core, the result of socialist expressions of monumentality and modernity. It has served as a major congress center in Dresden for more than thirty years. As Dresden’s new congress center rises up on the bank of the Elbe between Marienbrücke bridge and the Saxon Parliament Buildings by the year 2000, Kulturpalast will be converted into a concert hall and house Dresden’s Philharmonic Orchestra. This thesis focuses on the design of a new Kulturpalast as an activator of two public spaces of Dresden - Altmarkt and Neuemarkt. This is an inquiry into how this building should be shaped by its urban context, and how it should contribute to the urban character of these neighboring public spaces. Cultural activities should be brought towards the building’s periphery to bring new meaning to these public spaces and to create an architectural coherence.

The urban and architectural design of the concert hall complex is guided by three design principles. First, the complex attempts to construct a pedestrian transition between the neighboring Altmarkt and Neuemarkt. Secondly, the complex represents a hybrid as it meshes the object-like concert hall into a continuous urban fabric. And third, the complex aims to invent and frame new visual relationships of its urban surroundings.

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE INNER CITY

Although most of the historic core was formed in the 12th century, the city’s architectural and cultural character was primarily shaped during the 19th century, as evidenced by its heritage of outstanding Baroque architecture. The Slavic fisherman’s village of “Drezdzane” was first mentioned in 1206; the settlement was organized around a market square (today’s Neuemarkt) near today’s Frauenkirche. Nearby, the margrave of Meissen had built a castle around 1200 to guard a ford across the Elbe. Soon after, the margraves built up a town with a plan typical of East Germany; a square marketplace (today’s Altmarkt) in the center and a right-angled grid of property parcels lining narrow alleys. The village’s parish church stood at the site of today’s Kreuzkirche; the settlement’s main church at today’s Frauenkirche was later replaced by the famed baroque masterpiece which is now being rebuilt today. In 1216, the first fortification walls were built on the left bank of the Elbe, and a stone bridge connecting the two shores was built in 1287. Dresden’s real significance began in 1486, when the Wettiner family made the Elbe castle their permanent residence, and Duke Moritz was elevated to Elector in 1547.
The city received new and larger fortifications that also incorporated the original village surrounding the Fraunekirche. The old walls were replaced with more solid ramparts in order to increase the area of the inner city and to protect the right bank encircling both sides of the river. The narrow grid of medieval parcels and alleys, which had largely survived until 1945 disappeared in the course of post-war redevelopment.
Fig. 4 Plan of Dresden around 1500
Fig. 5 Plan of Dresden in 1632
THE NATURE OF THE ALTMARKT AND NEUEMARKT

The city squares are described by fabric blocks that form the streets. At the corner of the square, the object building itself is the size of an urban block, with a single main entrance usually addressing the square and its surroundings in a deliberate and relevant manner. The idea that the building should be viewed independently of its neighbors, or at least more prominently, is a Baroque one. A typical Baroque square would create axial relationships of street to object building, which does not exist in both Altmarkt and Neumarkt. Fig.2 (page 7) shows the plan of two squares: Altmarkt at bottom and Neumarkt at top. The views of Fig.6 and 7 describe two different types of squares; the first with the Frauenkirche as its point of focus, and the second without an object building to anchor it, suggesting that Altmarkt is simply a market square not planned to have the same symbolic significance as shown above. The streets that feed into the square relate to one another at oblique angles and vary significantly in their widths and paths. In contrast to what we know of other Baroque cities, these characteristics suggest that these churches are Baroque buildings placed in medieval squares.
Fig. 6 View of Neumarkt with Frauenkirche in background

Fig. 7 View of Altmarkt in 18th century
THE TASK:

KULTURPALAST IN URBAN CONTEXT

Following the war, Dresden's two major public squares, Neumarkt facing Frauenkirche and Altmarkt at the Kreuzkirche had been largely reconstructed after lengthy discussions amongst planners. Dresden's several masterpieces of Baroque architecture along the Elbe had been rebuilt exactly as they were before the war, but the Altmarkt was enlarged to serve, among other things, as a parade grounds for communist events, whilst the Neumarkt had yet to be spatially defined.

In contrast to the splendid panoramic view of Dresden along the Elbe and the unique modern pedestrian zone of Prager strasse, Dresden's Altmarkt and Neumarkt lost their spatial integrity after the war in spite of Dresdener's efforts to retain these major squares. The spaces between fragmented historical buildings and banal post-war structures are still problematic, and in many areas the once densely situated urban structures have been converted into monolithic modern building blocks or pseudo-baroque architecture.
Fig 8 The site
Kulturpalast is located in the middle of Dresden's historic core, the result of socialist expressions of monumentality and modernity. The traditional architectural fabric in this area - on the north side of the Altmarkt and on the west side of the Neuemarkt - has been completely replaced in the early sixties by a single box building, unconsolidated with its surroundings. The building exists as a separate entity, and has made it difficult to create meaningful public spaces around it. The space between Kulturpalast and Residenzschoß was designed as a parking lot without consideration of its importance as a spatial element of Neuemarkt and as a passage between the Altmarkt and the Neuemarkt. Furthermore, the broadened Wilsdruffer Strasse prevents this building from spatially defining the Altmarkt. The redesign of Kulturpalast should then explore the reconstruction of the historical core under new circumstances of place and time, which had been lost by oversimplified architectural solutions.
Fig. 10 pre-war Dresden’s Altstadt
Fig. 11 pre-war aerial view of the inner city
Fig. 12 pre-war aerial view of the Neuemarkt
Many plans were developed in the years following 1949. The new communist leaders became consumed with the idea of creating a new socialist city infused with social and political objectives. In 1952 a mandate required the construction of a "socialist city center" with a large space for socialist demonstrations and festivals, along with a towered house, much like the one in Moscow. The idea of the towered house was discarded after a bitter battle, resulting in only the low Kulturpalast being built. The existing Kulturpalast is too low to be an appropriate urban fabric against Altmarkt, and is distinguished by too many contrasting materials and colors: the base is polished red granite and the upper floors are aluminum-framed window set in white concrete.

By the time the expanded Altmarkt was rebuilt, the Soviet model adopted the GDR slogan, "Build better, faster and cheaper" to drive the post-war construction efforts. One turned to car-oriented planning, with multi-lane streets, free standing high-rises and long blocks. One of the most important tasks today is to repair the amorphous emptiness of the inner city.
Fig. 14 post-war Dresden’s Altstadt
Fig. 15 post-war aerial view of the inner city
Fig. 16 post-war aerial view of the Altmarkt and Kulturpalast
THE BUILDING PROGRAM:

THE CONCERT HALL COMPLEX WITH EVERYDAY LIFE

A large section of the public has an ever increasing amount of time to use for its leisure and education. There is a confusing variety of demands, however, which are placed on the concert hall as a "social" institution. An important factor behind the growing interest in concert halls as places is a new awareness of public spaces that differentiate this container of culture from others. Hans Sharoun described the uniqueness of the concert hall's public spaces as follows. "The Auditorium is based on internal requirements, being planned from the inside outwards, but it is surrounded by articulated ancillary parts which are positioned in response to sitting and orientation, so the overall layout is planned from the outside inwards. The foyer becomes the flexible elements which reconciles these inward and outward forces."

In spite of the concert halls' nature as public institutions, most concert halls are only open during performance, and secluded from everyday life. Kulturpalast seeks ways of incorporating everyday activities into the concert hall. The complex should mediate a transition between the inner city's commercial functions and the Elbe River's cultural institutions. Retail components and a music school with student housing will activate the building throughout the day and night.
PROGRAM AREAS

1) CONCERT HALL AND THEATER FACILITIES

A large concert hall seating around 1800 with recording facilities:
2000 sq.m
The concert hall is more like a theater in the round than the usual shoebox type concert hall. This also makes it suitable for many other forms of music, where emphasis is more on the presentation or acting, than on the performance of the music, as in so-called classical music.

A more intimate Hall for Dance and Ballet seating around 500:
400 sq.m
A smaller flexible space which attracts actors and artists to create their own work rather than reproduce the commercial successes of others.

Foyer: 0.5 ~1.2 sq.m per person
The concert hall is necessarily an isolated container allowing no visual or aural connection between inside and outside. Only the life in the foyer can be displayed transparently or exposed.

Rehearsal Hall / Pre-Concert Performance Space
Rehearsal room: space for orchestra, choir, chorus / "rostra" type arrangement
Rehearsal studio: A room for dance and ballet
Practice studios: group practice room (violin, viola...) / private practice room

Dressing Room
Changing rooms for musicians: 600 sq.m
Dressing rooms for ballet and drama for around 100 people: 200 sq.m

The Green Room
Restrooms / Cloakroom
Backstage Support / Storage Rooms / Loading Dock / Electrical and Mechanical Services
Office / Administration
Ticket office / Information

2) RETAIL

Cafés and Restaurants / Independent Shops: 4000 sq.m
Atrium for retail spaces

3) MUSIC SCHOOL

Student housing
Rehearsal rooms
Classrooms
Central hall
A small Recital Hall

4) PARKING:
2-floor underground parking: around 800 cars
After the war, a general plan for the city was finally adopted in 1967. The plan’s greatest impact on the inner city was felt through its broad, multi-lane streets, which ignored the historic grid, and left gaping spaces in the city core. In the 1980s, planners began to fill in the empty space with oversized, prefabricated apartment housing. This development ended with Germany’s reunification in 1990. Thereafter, the city of Dresden reconsidered the inner city’s structural plan and aimed to construct a functional and denser city core. A number of competitions had been held for the most important areas of the inner city. Fig. 100. shows the result of the different competitions within the 26 ring area. A major concern was the restoration of Dresden’s two major public spaces, Altmarkt and Neuemarkt, by urban infilling.
Fig. 17 urban design proposal by the city of Dresden (1994)
Fig. 18 view of the Altmarkt (1999)
Fig. 19 view of the Altmarkt from Kulturpalast (1999)
A PROPOSAL FOR KULTURPALAST AND THE NEUEMARKT

The new design of the Kulturpalast is based on the general urban design concept proposed by the city of Dresden. But the superimposed pre-war street patterns onto the existing condition are somewhat unrealistic, especially the area between the existing Kulturpalast and Residenzschloß. Rather than simply reconstructing the narrow street patterns originated from the medieval era without examination, the design of a new Kulturpalast should start from the idea of how to make meaningful open spaces around it. Furthermore, the site of Kulturpalast has a potential making the passage between the Altmarkt and Neuemarkt.

The wide open spaces around the building is reduced by the new complex, and the courtyard is planned as an outdoor performance space, a source of daylighting for the building, and an entrance court from the Neuemarkt. The concert hall is located on the back in order to create the deep public spaces facing the Altmarkt.
Fig. 20 A proposal for Kulturpalast and Neuemarkt
Fig. 21 Views of the urban spaces around Kulturpalast (1999)
Fig. 22 Views of the urban spaces around Kulturpalast (1999)
THE THREE DESIGN PRINCIPLES:

A PEDESTRIAN TRANSITION BETWEEN THE NEIGHBORING ALTMARKT AND NEUEMARKT

The complex attempts to construct a pedestrian transition between the neighboring Altmarkt and Neuemarkt by arranging all public spaces of the building along the courtyard oriented toward the Neuemarkt. Unlike most concert halls, the public spaces will be dispersed along this path and will remain open during the day. The spatial progression through the Altmarkt, the building and the Neuemarkt constitutes the complex's major spatial experience. The two major public spaces of the building, the concert hall foyer and the retail atrium are in diagonal relationship with each other. The convergence between the public, the private, and in-between spaces occurs within this zone.
Fig. 23 A transition between the neighboring Altmarkt and Neuemarkt

Fig. 24 Public spaces
THE OBJECT-LIKE CONCERT HALL ENVELOPED BY A CONTINUOUS URBAN FABRIC

The complex represents a hybrid as it meshes the object-like concert hall into a continuous urban fabric. The building as a whole is articulated into discrete parts as if they were blocks in the city and is marked by a glass-covered space between the concert hall and theater. The concert hall itself is surrounded by shops and other facilities such as rehearsal halls and the music school at the upper levels. Not only does this establish a link to the complex’s urban surroundings, it also eliminates the freestanding nature of the building. An autonomous, freestanding monument would have conflicted with design goals in accessibility. Seen from the outside, the complex as a whole appears to have an arbitrary form but does not give the impression one expects of an autonomous building. The building should be designed to integrate its urban surroundings as much as possible.
Fig. 25 Symbolic object vs. urban fabric

Fig. 26 Program

THE THREE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

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NEW VISUAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN KULTURPALAST AND ITS URBAN SURROUNDINGS

Kulturpalast aims to invent and frame new visual relationships of its surroundings. There are several moments of viewing the city in a particular way throughout the complex.

The theater hall is the best place to look out upon the Neuemarkt and Frauenkirche, which is currently under reconstruction. The full-height glazing of the theater hall will provide a dramatic view towards Frauenkirche, one of the most artistic and creative expressions of German Protestantism and one of the grandest and most original Baroque dome solutions. Viewing balconies are placed off the major circulation paths providing visual moments of people’s movement. Viewing platforms are located at the highest level in the complex which look out towards the Altmartk and the courtyard.
Fig. 27 Visual connections

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S = 1:1000
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$S = 1:750$
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fig.6, fig.7:

fig.8, fig.10, fig.11, fig.13:

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