WOOD GIVES NEW LIFE TO A CONCRETE COLOSSOUS

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ABSTRACT: The building of the printing factory Mladinska knjiga is an existing architecture built in the 1960’s by Savin Sever, a Slovenian modernist architect. It is a structurally and materially honest load-bearing structure of concrete beams with brick infill and distinctive light openings on the roof. To revive the abandoned building, an idea of three art academies, united under one roof, was put to test, proposing a new wooden intervention to bring life into this interesting existing structure. Wooden platforms create a semipublic interior space and path connections, wooden screens form new spaces within the existing volume. Linear openings in concrete slabs allow light to descend to the lower levels. The new wooden tower with student residences, at the north of the complex, is a vertical closure of the path which leads through the building. The idea of a wooden tower is realized by stacked horizontal slabs, connected with ramps, thus creating an ambient path. The circumference is left empty for common activities. It opens views towards the city center and the Alps.

KEYWORDS: timber upgrade, architectural renovation, multi-storey timber buildings

1 INTRODUCTION

The story of old industrial buildings in dense urban areas that are left neglected or were demolished and rebuilt, has a long history. With an open minded approach, inventive architecture and possibilities of construction engineering, older buildings can be given a new life. This approach of reuse is also following the actual aspects of sustainability and ecology. The enormous, three storey printing factory building, covering over 4000 square metres, is located at the boundary between the city’s financial district and the residential area. The majority of work presented in this paper is based on the awarded project of the 2013 ‘Wooden skyscrapers – dream or reality?’ conference and interdisciplinary student workshop, which was a part of the international ‘Month of design’ event, held yearly in Ljubljana.

2 RENOVATION OF ARCHITECTURE FROM the 1960’S

Savin Sever was a student of the Ljubljana school of Architecture and one of the most important Slovenian architects of the 1960’s. The Mladinska knjiga printing factory, together with the Merkur pavilion, is one of his most famous works. The existing building (Fig. 1) is constructed as a system of long concrete beams sitting on pillars, thus creating a completely open floor plan of extreme dimensions, with light falling from the spacings between the concrete roof beams. As it is common for the architecture of this period, the architectural language derives from its structure. The intervention’s main goal was revitalization. Learning, reading and understanding the architectural history, was the foundation for defining and creating new. Revitalization means bringing new life to the renewed old structures.
By conscious addition of all the necessary new infrastructure a new balance in space is established and new conditions for life are allowed in the old. From a technical point of view, the architecture and engineering input for achieving an effective and stable structure renovation can be more challenging in an old building than in a building which is conceived from scratch.

3 PROPOSAL

Our site is located along the Dunajska street, the north axis of Ljubljana. It is surrounded mostly by housing and commercial buildings. Nearby a small student campus is located. The proposal is an opportunity to organize an urban infill which could intensify the character of the site and connect the student institutions as a whole. The proposal to join three academies, the Academy of Fine Arts, the Academy of Music and Academy of Theater, and unite them under one roof, opens up a competence for mutual interactions and artistic cooperation.

The proposal for Academies of Arts, is situated in the existing building of the printing factory, and placed on a new platform, along the so-called student promenade.

The raised platform creates the main entrance on the south side of the building, runs through the academies foyer, along the concert and theater halls. On the north side, the ramp takes you to the roof where a huge outdoor square is planned with and open air auditorium, sport fields and accompanying program.

The planned program of each Academy, embedded in its own part of the existing building is intertwined through joint lecture rooms, halls, galleries and foyer. They are all sorted along the platform, thus creating a complex public space.

The new wooden tower, a vertical closure of the path through the building, is located at the North edge of the existing factory. The wooden vertical is designed as a combination of horizontal slabs, stacked in height, and connected together with ramps. Between slabs, inserted volumes are creating a distinction between open public spaces of community and privacy of the student rooms.

The concept of the oldest and most characterful part of the building is light. The visitors are passing through the light elements on the roof, which illuminate the interior. New horizontal skylights in the slabs that follow the geometry of the building are leading rays of light into the lower floor and allowing them to be attributed to the new content, the studio spaces of the Academy of Fine Arts.

The proposed new intervention (Fig. 2) is visibly separated with the existing elements by the material – wood. It is in contrast to the current concrete in color, texture, and tactility. With its appearance, it gives a soft and warm impression. It is a lightweight, precast element that does not outshine the existing structures, but plays the role of the new connecting element.

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