

The Processes of Contemporary Museum Constructions: Designing Public Space and Engaging Audiences

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New museum buildings in CEE are monuments that relate to negotiating new narratives of identity and statehood. Our aim in this article is to close-study the processes related to three museum constructions in Central Eastern Europe – Estonia, Hungary and Croatia. We examine the three public museums in the context of their locations, ranging from the suburbs to the city centres and study their establishment in the context of privatization, urbanisation, and reaching out for the audiences. The architecture of new museum buildings is seen as an outcome of historical and social processes growing out from the recent past of the three countries. In the contemporary arena the museum represents the reinterpreted relationships between private and public, as well as culture and money. All three new museum constructions have been driven by interests of different public authorities, neoliberal market actors, and to a lesser degree, by the local citizen society.

Keywords: Central Eastern Europe, museum boom, museum architecture, spatial politics, audience engagement

Cultural infrastructure provides a means for the legitimisation of contemporary nation states. It also provides marketing visibility to the springing companies, and acts as a diplomatic tool in fostering international relations. New venues established for art act as houses for collections and negotiators of reality through series of representations. On the local level art reflects the aspirations of minority communities within a society, and has a potential to engage the audiences further with their environment, through creating new communities and bringing together interest-groups. Contemporary art has a potential to shape urban fabric in various ways also through architecture and urban design, which can trigger important changes for the neighbourhood, for the city and the country.

The urban geography of CEE capitals has been influenced by rapid changes during the past two decades. This study focuses on the urban context of the new museum buildings and some of the difficulties that have been faced by the museum institutions due to the lack of consideration of spatial planning and engagement of audiences along the process. In our analysis, we take into account the various interests surrounding the processes of new museum constructions in the transforming societies.

Built environment is deeply intervened with the cultural, social and political webs of the society, which enables to understand the power positions in the society better. Talking about the CEE countries as *transitioning societies* proves to be relevant, although this has become contested after joining the EU. When it comes to studying national institutions and new framework for designing spaces, in order to celebrate the sovereignty shape the public space according to the new principles, the common elements become difficult to be neglected. Despite the fact that state-building processes have continued throughout the past 20 years, the negotiation of private and public interests, visualized in the contests over public space and its usage are still in active process.

Suzanne Keene has seen national museums as symbols of national culture, knowledge and pride¹, which may be contested and negotiated but for CEE countries also represent a necessity, for legitimating the new governance. This contest and negotiation over interests is also embodied in the museums architecture and in the processes of coming to have these museums in their present form and location. Museum architecture as a topic, following the museum boom of the 1990s, is relatively new field of study. Although several researches have focused on the regenerative impacts of cultural projects and many pages have been dedicated to analysing the Guggenheim Bilbao building, other new museum buildings figure much more seldom in these studies. Our study aims to give a contribution to filling this gap, through focusing three new museum constructions in CEE region. Museum buildings through being of symbolic value to the societies stand out being one of the most expensive public buildings in the newly independent states or societies which have established the national sovereignty.

What are the necessities for and driving focuses behind the new museums constructions in the transitioning societies? What are the power positions that the museum constructions have revealed? And how can these questions be conceptualised within the framework of the museums architectural and urban environment? In this paper we will not provide answers to all these questions but rather discuss the related impacts of new, recently opened national museums to three societies in the Central Eastern European region.

Background and Analysis Material

This article forms a part of research project on new contemporary art museums “Contemporary Art Museums in the Central and Eastern Europe. Art and the Social, Political, Economic development of the region” carried out by Margaret Tali and Laura Pierantoni from

1 Keene, Suzanne (2005). *Fragments of the World. Uses of Museum Collections*. London: Elsevier, p 7.

March 2007 to October 2008, which studies three national museums in the context of political, social, economical and cultural changes of the turbulent times in the 1990s and 2000s. The three case studies that we have been taken under focus are: KUMU - the Estonian Modern and Contemporary Art Museum in Tallinn, LUMU - the Hungarian Contemporary Art Museum in Budapest, and the MSU - Croatian Contemporary Art Museum in Zagreb. All three new museums constructions are located in the capital cities, they cover different regions in the heterogeneous territory of Central Eastern Europe, north, central and southern regions respectively. Whereas Budapest and Tallinn are the capital cities historically, Zagreb has become a capital city fairly recently, following the Yugoslavian War in the 1990s and Croatia's gaining of national sovereignty in 1991. The same year signifies gaining of national independence for all three countries, and remains therefore an important signifier of changes.

The aim of this study is to analyse the museums' architectural settings, focusing on the impacts they have had to the process of designing urban space in the particular districts, where they are located. We also try to offer insights into ways of engaging the audiences in the process by museums, in order later to better adapt the public with the new location of the venue, which will provide a context for our further study on the museums changing relationship with the audiences through engaging further with education. KUMU and LUMU new museum buildings have been opened for public in 2005 and 2006 respectively, MSU new building is currently still under construction, and due to the economical hardships met in the course of construction works the exact time of opening the museum to the audiences remains open.² For the latter we can only take into account the architectural design and current stages of construction, indicating some of the criticism and political hardships related to the funding on the way to the transformation. Several other aspects of the museums are particular for the societies, having developed from the context of their establishing: the foundation their collections and births of the institutions are very different. Indeed so different that it almost seems impossible to compare them.

Whereas Art Museum of Estonia's collection dates back to 1919 (nowadays, contemporary art forms only a part of the collection); and the Zagreb MSU museum collection is based on a City owned Gallery, which was started in 1954; the Budapest LUMU museum collection is based on the German art collectors Peter and Irene Ludwig's collection, a large part of which was donated to the Hungarian Government in 1989, and has been later completed by other public and private acquisitions. The locations chosen for the new museum buildings in the city are likewise notably different, their impacts on the regeneration of the districts can only be compared taking these distinct differences and historical developments related to decisions of museums moving into the particular urban districts into account.

In this paper we see museums as platforms where different interests come together. This proposes the inevitably an on-going project, driven by political, economical interests, but just as well through changes in the museums top administrations and governance models. It is particularly the multifunctional character of contemporary museum institutions combining different venues and activities, that makes them so vulnerable to these various changes in the context of transition societies.

We focus on three aspects in the new museum developments: firstly, the process related to the museums architectural design and facts on the process of their construction will be studied. Secondly, the impacts of the transformation of space to the museum institutions are outlined, introducing some of the problems related to the process of moving from one building that has been adapted as a museum into another new building designed particularly

2 Interview with Snjezana Pintaric, MSU Museum Director, Zagreb, 7.03.2008.

for the institution. And finally, the the museum names as symbolical indicators for their international mindedness will be analysed.

The research material used in the present study is gathered mostly from first hand sources, interviews with museum directors, collection keepers, architects and cultural policy makers. We are grateful for their cooperation and this article would not have been made possible without their kind support and interest in our study. Various media sources and academic articles have been used for completing the study. Studies on museum architecture, cultural policy and city regeneration have offered our analysis a sustainable theoretical context for this article.

Theoretical Framework and Context for Analysis

Museum Institution and Cultural and Political Transition in the CEE

The cultural and economic sphere of CEE countries has gone through extensive changes following the early 1990s political transformations and the fall of the Communist Regime, which broke down the physical and intellectual barriers that had left the region culturally and economically isolated for decades. The mechanisms of this isolation varied throughout the single countries. After many years influenced by state socialism, the aim of the countries has been to recover from the backwardness, through strengthening collaboration with EU countries in order to eventually join the union as member states. It is important to keep in mind that this aim for Croatia is still remains to be reached, and many of the current reforms target the standards.³ In the cultural sector several changes have affected the way culture is governed, organized, produced and perceived by the larger public. Above all:

- *privatisation*: during the Real Socialist regime the state was the main financier and organizer of all cultural activities, as well as the body who set standards and mechanisms of control for the cultural life. Nowadays, local as well as international private investors have become crucial to the development of the cultural sector.
- *the introducing of free market economy*: the liberal economic system has enabled the cultural sector to take advantage of international know-how and skills, cultural exchange and new technical facilities to facilitate collaboration and mutual cultural exchange, but also caused a tendency of scepticism towards globalisation and related phenomena;
- *decentralization of cultural life*: the end of the Real Socialism allowed the sovereign countries to take decisions independently and to develop their own cultural policies;
- *urban development and pos-socialist city-planning*: internationalisation of architectural landscape and lack of thorough urban planning policies has reshaped the image and functions of urban areas particularly in CEE capitals.

Certainly, none of these changes have not been as rosy as they may seem, the least for national museums. Some of the recessions related to cultural life can be exemplified in the fact that cultural participation in CEE has gone through a decrease, the situation of the

3 In the process of enlargement of the EU eight countries from the CEE region joined in 2004, incl. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia. In 2007, Bulgaria and Romania, joined the European Community.

creative people in the labour market has become growingly uncertain.⁴ The state support for museums under the conditions of market economy is also no longer as evident as earlier, setting museums under rising pressure of constantly attesting their requirements and relevant costs. In 1992 Zbynek Z. Stransky has foreseen many of the problems facing post-Soviet museums observing that museums need to overcome the feeling of aversion of the audiences on the way from one society to another, which to a smaller or greater degree served the totalitarian regime. He suggested to review the outdated ways of responding to the interests of the public in order to address important social issues.⁵

The concept of re-publicizing the public sphere proposed by Dutch urban researchers Elma van Boxel and Kristian Koreman⁶ seems best to characterize some of these developments, if we consider the museums in the public realm, and furthermore as parts of public space. Despite the quick economic transitions to market economy, the changes in post socialist museums have often proved to be rather gradual, both on the level of cultural policy reform considerations and in what concerns the institutional culture within museum as large-scale cultural institutions. Ben Dibley has argued the identity shift for museums to be related with the bond linking the individual with the state. From this suppressed type of individualisation, museums find themselves confronted with the demands of minorities and the marginalized, and consequently it follows that museums are to be reformed and made more reflexive in their institutional practices and dialogic in their exchanges with communities that form their constituencies.⁷ Reinventing their roles and status within the society with the burden of dealing with the communities bitter experiences from the recent past, has therefore made the identity transformation for post socialist museums a particularly painful experience, although, little of this may be seen from outside.

Another post-socialist concern, in relation to the broader re-organization of the cultural scene has been the enabling of the development of bottom-up initiatives in the arts sector and their functioning along the principles of civil society under social democracy. The coming of neo-liberal market and growing tourism industry has set its restrictions to these developments and one of its outcomes has been the focus of fundraisers on large-scale institutions, encouraged by both cultural policies as well as the international corporations. The question whether these new public monuments facilitate the development of art scenes and enable transparent governance for arts remains contested by the young civil society and fairly often by the institutions themselves. The developments of architecture as the new wonder-field of 1990s capture many important hardships on the way of reconstructing economies and redesigning the public life, in the sense of engagement of different interest groups and viewpoints. Moving to a new building may be seen as a motivator on the way to reinventing the museum's institutional roles and reviewing its objectives. New museum buildings as highly symbolical structures have often been one of the most expensive buildings constructed by the governments after the 1990s. The processes bring together the widespread corruption, intransparency of political decision-making, they reveal absence of experiences in international cooperation and furthermore the indapted changes in people's mindset.

4 Compendium of European Cultural Policies, www.culturalpolicies.net.

5 Stransky, Zbynek Z (1992). Museums in Post-Communist countries. *Museums and Europe 1992*. Susan Pearce (ed). London, NY: The Athlone Press, pp 183-185.

6 Van Boxel, Elma; Koreman, Kristian (2007). *Re-public. Towards a new spatial politics*. Rotterdam: Nai Publishers.

7 Dibley, Ben (2005). The Museum's redemption. Contact zones, government and the limits of reform. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol 8, (1), p 7.

New Museum Institutions

Our mapping of the recently established contemporary art museums or constructions that are planned to be established in CEE countries has indicated that there is a tendency of building new nation-wide venues for contemporary art. In this chapter we have briefly mapped the new museums constructions in order to indicate the growing boom of contemporary art museums in CEE.

Investing in new art infrastructure may seem questionable, in terms of justifying the high expenditure for the audiences. Is it really in search of the legitimisation of recent reign that CEE countries governments have decided to invest so extensively into building new contemporary art museums? Close-studying some of these projects reveal that the completing of these buildings has often taken much more time than originally planned, fairly often they have continued to be postponed or brought about numerous debates about the needs of these investments on the local level. They have also caused much of public discontent and misunderstanding. We will later analyse further some of the reasons for the latter. Nevertheless, next to public investments, public private partnerships have recently become more common facilitator in the cultural sector and collaborations with international corporative foundations such as Guggenheim or Ludwig Foundation have enabled the establishment of several recent art institutions in CEE.

Public investments are primarily used in the case of Warsaw Modern Art Museum, MoMA, which is planned to be opened in 2012, in the new cultural district in the Polish capital, Warsaw, and Art Museum of Estonia (AME), Kumu⁸ that opened in the beginning of 2006 in the prestigious Tallinn suburb called Kadriorg. The Warsaw MoMa is situated in the Świętokrzyski Park and the regenerative potential of the complex of public buildings has been taken into account, since the museum is planned as a part of the new science and cultural district, to become a new city square.⁹ On the both cases the competitions held for the building have been international, and the museums are completed by relatively young foreigner architects in the beginning of their career, respectively the Swiss architect Christian Kerez (b.1962) and Finnish architect Pekka Vapavuori (b.1962).

On the urban level, a new museum building also embodies a potential of becoming a key element in the regeneration of an area, bringing along positive investments and redesigning for the landscape in collaboration with the city (infrastructure and lightening the area, promoting safety, new transportation), therefore the city governments may be as important parties for investments as the national governments are.

The building of a new museum is a response of the societies needs to meet the interests of its communities better. Here the interests related to these buildings, erected in the capital cities fighting for further visibility, come together with the interests of the states. For instance, the Zagreb City Government has funded the construction the national museum building, Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, MSU covering 50% of the costs in collaboration with the Government¹⁰. Here the new museum is a political signifier, which is able to contribute to both, strengthen the fairly recent capital city status of Zagreb (since 1991) in the Balkan region and promote Croatia's candidateship for the European Union.

New model for national art museum housed in the same building with numerous small-scale cultural industries, has been proposed to be established in the Latvian capital Riga, where the plan engages numerous private investors and donors, who share the interest for a new multifunctional centre next to the Latvian Government. The building design for the former power plant in the banks of the River Daugava was completed by the two Dutch

8 Art Museum of Estonia, <http://www.ekm.ee>.

9 See further Warsaw Museum of Modern Art, <http://artmuseum.pl/>.

10 Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, http://www.msu.hr/index_e.htm.

architects Rem Koolhaas and Reinier de Graaf, who won the design competition in 2006. The museum building in the port area is currently planned to be completed by 2012.¹¹

On the other hand, it can be argued that the CEE countries are influenced by the Western model of a white cube and cultural mall, which is not only being implemented by the governments but also international museum corporations, paying little if any importance to acting as a facilitator for the local art scene, and whose interests maybe controversial or have little in common with the particular local needs of local the audiences. In 2008 the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture confirmed the establishment of a new museum institution called Guggenheim Hermitage Museum, to be completed through collaboration of the Guggenheim Foundation and Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. The architectural design competition for a building to be established in new business centre in the capital Vilnius was won in spring 2008 by Zaha Hadid Architects.¹² The collaboration between the two museum institutions, Guggenheim Foundation and State Hermitage Museum started in the 1990s as they started organizing mutual exchange exhibitions curated in the venues of Guggenheim museums and Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. The collaboration was developed further as the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum was opened in Los Angeles, USA in 2001. The building was designed by Rem Koolhaas and his company OMA, based in Rotterdam and has been later celebrated for its architectural design.

There are also countries where the debates on the need of having a venue dedicated to contemporary art have been lively during the recent years and enliven by artist communities, involving various audiences. An interesting example, is Ivan Moudov's art performance in Sofia, Bulgaria, which brought the absence of contemporary art museum in the country into the limelight of international media. In 2005, Moudov gathered an honourable audience to the abandoned train station in Sofia. In the press release he announced the former train station to be newly opened as MUSIZ, the Museum of Contemporary Art. Through the opening of a "phantom museum", he attracted international and local media attention and gather numerous important political figures, ambassadors, to the decaying train station. The political importance of the artist's venture, has been proved by the fact that following Moudov's performance the establishment of a new contemporary art museum has become more seriously debated in the Bulgarian government.¹³

The *museum race*¹⁴ which seems best to characterize the recent developments in CEE, growing out from the processes of nation state building and identity formation, may not be unique, but remains yet fairly particular in the regional and temporary context of the process. Many of the design competitions for new museum buildings have won considerable media attention, attracting internationally star architects, and proposing new monumental structures to be established in the CEE capitals.

Three New Venues for Contemporary Art: Tallinn, Budapest and Zagreb

The stories behind the construction of the three museums are long and complex, reflecting the economical and political difficulties that Estonia, Hungary and Croatia have been going through in the 1990s and 2000s. In the cultural scene all three processes of constructing new

11 Riga Contemporary Art Museum, <http://www.camriga.lv/index.php>.

12 *First steps to Guggenheim museum in Vilnius*. 07.10.2007.
http://www.culturelive.lt/en/news/guggenheim_museum.

13 Sevova, Dimitrina (2007) *Back to reality, or Micro-approaches for handling institutional matrices in the local art context the 21st century*. Available at: <http://www.code-flow.net/e-texts/2006-vector-03/vector-museums-en.html>.

14 Szantos, Andreas (2001) Art/Architecture; museum building in Budapest style. *The New York Times*, Aug 26.

museums have involved overcoming the decentralization in arts, the non-transparent and bureaucratic culture of decision making inherited from the recent socialist past, as well as challenges related to the recent internationalization of cultural life and arts market.

Planning for a Building

The museums architecture is one of the crucial frameworks in constructing identity for a museum. It has a considerable role to play in defining the relationships between the museum and its audiences. It shapes the museum experience for the audiences, and the ways they are reached; for the museum institution the architectural framework also considerably dictates on the programming and curating activities, as well as the possibilities for engaging the public space. Therefore, the active public debates over the question whether the city needs a new venue for contemporary art and what should be location for it is natural to engage people. The debates lasted several decades for the KUMU and are still continuing in Zagreb, as the MSU museum is being constructed. Art Museum of Estonia (AME) was established in 1919 as a part of national movement following the official declaration independence of the country in February 1918. AME grew out of the special part of the collection dedicated to art in the Estonian National Museum. The first project was postponed due to the simultaneous and expensive construction-works of the Tallinn Art Hall (1934), the second project was elaborated until 1938, the construction-works were supposed to start in 1939, but due to the World War II and following Soviet occupation of Estonia the construction was never started and the museum remained housed in a “temporary building” for the next 50 years.

The institution for Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb (MSU) grew out from the City Gallery of Contemporary Art established in 1954 by the artist Vesna Barbic, whereas its scope of activities was initially set on international art. The establishing of a gallery also related to the Zagreb Fair, which being launched in 1948, due to its highly international character continued to be of great political importance throughout the Cold War. The Fair also acted as an instrument for urbanization and modernization of Zagreb throughout 1960s and 1970s.¹⁵

In both of these cases, the museum institutions preceded the existence of the new building for a long time period and have a history of being developed during the socialist period. The museums were located in (temporary) buildings in Tallinn and Zagreb old towns. Lack of space and proper storage conditions for art in these historical buildings, which had been accommodated to house museums, under the centralized Government of USSR and Titoist Yugoslavian Government, respectively remained one of the most important argument introduced for public, leaving the other arguments to the background. Despite this or perhaps particularly due to this, the collections were still due to remain displayed and stored in inappropriate venues for another decade. In Zagreb, despite for the fact that the museum was planned to be opened in September 2007, the construction is currently still continuing and the time of inauguration remains unclear.

Despite the present situation, for both museums, KUMU and MSU the stories of having a new building for the museum go back further in history. The discussion on establishing a new museum building for MSU started already in the 1960s although no architectural competitions were organized at the time, and the spot for the museum in the city remained contested by the different parties of interest throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In 1983 a plan for a museum network was initiated, which saw the New Museum building for Contemporary Art to become a centre for museum organization, for all other museums and galleries in

15 Vukic, Fedja (2007) *The Zagreb Fair: Urban Laboratory. Project Zagreb. Transition as a Condition, Strategy, Practice*. Blau, Eve; Rupik, Ivan (eds.). Barcelona, New York: Actar D, p 214

Croatia.¹⁶ In the end of the 1980s a building of Steam Mill in the centre of Zagreb in close neighbourhood of the Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall (1973)¹⁷ and future National and University Library (1995). Nevertheless, the plan was disclaimed after an extensive fire that took place in the Mill in 1988 and the institution had to wait until 1996 when the spot for the museum was finally decided by the Zagreb City Government and the Ministry of Culture.¹⁸

In Estonia, likewise discussions over the establishment of a building started in the 1930s. In this case, two architectural competitions were held, first in 1932-33 and the second international invited competition in 1936 for a spot situated between the medieval Tallinn old town and port area, in the heart of the city. In the latter case the architectural unions of Estonia, Finland, Sweden and Hungary proposed candidates for the competitions. Both competitions were won by two local architects, Erich Jacoby and Edgar Kuusik, whose project in 1936 was preferred for Alvar Aalto's museum design. The first project was postponed due to the simultaneous and expensive construction-works of the Tallinn Art Hall (1934), the second project was elaborated until 1938, the construction-works were supposed to start in 1939, but due to the World War II and following Soviet occupation of Estonia the construction was never started and the museum remained housed in a "temporary building" for the next 50 years.

The establishing of the new building for the Ludwig Museum was related to the ambitious plans of the Budapest City government, which were launched in the end of 1980s and involved the organizing of a joint World Fair, EXPO in Budapest and Vienna in 1995. Establishing the new cultural infrastructure in Budapest was planned hand in hand with the large-scale collaborative project of great political importance. The event was seen as a symbol that would arch over the Iron Curtain¹⁹, and enable to restore further collaboration between the two European historical capitals, both adjacent to the River of Danube.

Despite the fact that following the fall of Soviet Union Austria became an important investor in Hungarian economy, the EXPO project that was proposed under the circumstances of 1980s world economy of division, in 1991 the costs for the project were reviewed and the project that would have undoubtedly boosted the Austrian investors entry to the Hungarian markets and establish the long-term collaboration between the two cities was given up. One of the concerns of Vienna may have also been the pollution of the common waters of Danube. The joint World Fair EXPO 1995 was never held, instead the World Fair 1996 took place in the Web, under the name *World Fair for Internet Age*, to celebrate the coming of internet and borderless communications.²⁰

As a part of developing infrastructure for the EXPO the holding of which was still uncertain in the beginning of 1990s, Budapest City saw the establishment of new cultural infrastructure as a good way to regenerate and bring new liveliness to the formerly abandoned district by Danube River. This was also seen as a way of further involvement for other investors interest in the area.²¹ An international art museum certainly also provided a tool to compete with other major European capital cities, to establish the reputation of Budapest internationally. Several cultural institutions were planned in the area of IX District as a part of

16 Pintaric, Snjezana (2007) *On the way to the new building: the museum of contemporary art Zagreb*. Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary art, pp 15-17.

17 The Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall, built in 1973, was reconstructed for Eurovision Song Contest held in Zagreb 1990, which shortly following the fall of the Berlin Wall was an event of great political importance. Later on the venue has been reconstructed, following the Yugoslavian War.

18 Pintaric, Snjezana (2007) *On the way to the new building: the museum of contemporary art Zagreb*. Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary art, p 20.

19 Bohlen, Celestine (1991). Budapest Gets Cold Feet On Big Fair With Vienna. *The New York Times*, 22 Jan

20 For further see: <http://parallel.park.org/About/Fair/>.

21 Interview with Ivan Ronai, Museums Expert, Hungarian Ministry of Culture, 25.02.3007.

the project. One of the most important infrastructural changes in the IX District was the construction of a new bridge, Lágymányosi, connecting Buda and Pest along the Danube. The 200m bridge was completed in October 1995, and enabled to further development of the plans for the National Theatre and Palace of Arts, a combination Concert Hall and Contemporary Art Museum. After the plan for EXPO was abandoned the City of Budapest and Hungarian Government nevertheless continued the developing of the regenerative urban design project for the District IX, engaging the private sector and local real estate developers into its accomplishments. As a result in four years, 2001-2004, the Palace of Art building was completed in partnership of the Hungarian Government and the Hungarian based Trigranit Development Corporation.

The Geographical Location of the Museums

In all the three cases the previous venues that hosted the national contemporary art collections were located in the heart of the cities, particularly in the old towns. The new museum buildings, on the other hand in case of KUMU and MSU are located in the edge of the cities, and adjacent to residential areas from the 1970s. All three museums are away from the traditional tourists' routes, the particular areas and plots even remain relatively poorly accessible by public transportation.

The location for the new building for Estonian Art Museum was chosen in 1991 by the local intellectuals out of 11 potential spots in collaboration with the Tallinn City Government. On one hand, the choice for the current location for the museum, when accessed from the city side may seem relatively safe and traditional for a museum. The well-designed Kadriorg park offers French landscape views, with flower gardens, ponds and remains surrounded by historical palace buildings such as the Presidential Palace, and Palace of Catherinental, which used to locate the museum until 1991. On the other hand, KUMU has been criticized widely for the closing away from the neighbouring residential Lasnamäe district.²² The character of the building indeed refuses to relate to the rest of the urban surroundings, particularly with Lasnamäe, which is inhabited primarily by the Russian-speaking minority groups. As a consequence the architectural form continues to reinforce the urban gap and lack of governmental and municipal interest in investing into social cohesion.

In case of LUMU and MSU museums, the plans for regeneration which is expected to result from the construction of the museum building in the particular areas is more visible. Both museums act as facilitators, and play a crucial role in the strategical planning of the districts – District IX in Budapest and Novi Zagreb residential area in Zagreb. At the same time, through these ambitious plans, the cultural institutions are set into the position, where they have to cope with a reality characterized by the low offer of all other facilities and services in their close surroundings. The absence of restaurants and shops, is especially visible in the case of Novi Zagreb area, known as the city dormitory.²³ This sets the new museums in search for an identity under additional pressure adding new responsibilities, especially in order to meet the various needs of their audiences. The possibilities of the museums to deal with these questions, that were hardly in the scope of their activities in the previous location, depend on their generally tight budgets and ways of involving the corporations in their activities. During the first years following its opening LUMU museum (2005) has had to struggle in order to find ways to attract visitors even among the local

22 Lehtovuori, Panu (2006). A Secret Art Passage. New Estonian Art Museum KUMU. *Maja. Estonian Architectural Review*, Tallinn: Maja Publishing House, No 2.

23 Pintaric, Snjezana (2007), *On the way to the new building: the museum of contemporary art Zagreb*, Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary art, p.28.

people, and make them feel confident about the new location of the museum.²⁴ The importance of marketing has therefore become notably more crucial in order to sustain the activities and find ways to engage investors and guarantee the income from the tickets sales.

The story of LUMU museums new location is one of the most particular of the three. As a public museum, LUMU was founded in 1989 on the basis of the agreement signed between the German art-collectors Peter and Irene Ludwig and the Hungarian Ministry of Culture, as part of the collection was donated to the Hungary. The new museum was located in one of the wings of Royal Palace in Buda. In 1996 the museum collections went through an extensive and the need for a new building became further discussed. Consequently, the institution moved to the new venue built in the District IX in 2005. What is striking about the museum relocation to the building of Palace of Arts, is that the decision was made during the time that the construction works had already started. The museum spaces were built, with little consultation with museum curators, and collection keepers on the distribution of needed space and other special conditions required for the museum facilities.²⁵ The Palace of Art building currently remains an isolated cluster of construction works: the new business and residential area to be. From the initial plan to concentrate several cultural venues in the area as a part of planning for EXPO, only the National Theatre (architect Maria Siklos, 2004) has been completed.

The Architectural and Urban Design

The outcome of the architecture often depends on who the real client is architectural critic Martin Filler has written on the museum constructions, reflecting on the corporate interests and prospects of the city for heightening its prestige through the spectacularness of its public buildings. According to him the architectural Maecenas may well vary depending on the personality as much as on the authority of the involved parties.²⁶ Important iconic buildings have often played a crucial role for the young architects desiring to establish a name and build recognizable monuments for their further career. The architects of the three museums, being born in the 1960s: Igor Franic (Croatia, MSU), Pekka Vapaavuori (Estonia, KUMU), Gabor Zaboki and Nora Demeter (Hungary, LUMU) have been all relatively young at the time when the designs have been chosen.²⁷ Finnish architect Vapaavuori even got the assignment shortly after graduating from his studies as an architect. Most outspokenly among the three museums architects, Vapaavuori has most pretentiously named the New York Guggenheim Museum, and Louisiana Museum in Copenhagen as his main sources for inspiration in the museum design.²⁸ Nevertheless, the influences of the Kiasma museum (Steven Holl, 1998) visible especially at the entrance of Kumu. Architectural design competitions for Kiasma and KUMU were indeed carried out simultaneously, both in 1994. Whereas Kiasma was completed in four years, Kumu was open 12 years following the design competition. All winning architectural designs at the competition for Art Museum of Estonia were done by Finnish architects, which naturally caused great discontent among the Estonian community of architects and other intellectuals. The criticism involved particularly the size of the museum building, which was considered too big among the general audience as the functions of museum in the society

24 Interview with Anna Balvanyos, Head of the Program Department, LUMU Museum, 3.01.2008.

25 Ibid.

26 Filler, Martin (2005). Museums and the Maecenas Touch. *Architectural Record*, Vol 11, Nov, p 99.

27 Either during the national museum design competition, or shortly after all the winning architects have established their architectural offices, Studio za Arhitekturu (based in Zagreb), Arkva OY (based in Turku), and Zaboki&Demeter Associates (based in Budapest), respectively.

28 Valme, Valner; Hein, Inna-Katrin (2005). Eeskujuks New Yorgi Guggenheim. Interview with Pekka Vapaavuori, *Postimees*, Jan 8

remained largely incomprehensible in the early 1990s.²⁹ Through the involvement of several Finnish architectural and consultation companies (Finnish Foundation for Architecture Engel OY et al.) in the further works on the architectural design of the museum, Kiasma remained a model for Kumu not only in technical sense, but also in the sense of providing know-how about the contemporary museum institution through several education courses.³⁰

The KUMU museum design following the arch shape submitted as “CIRCULOS” for the international architectural competition (1992) gives an ageless form to the building. It is well fitted into the landscape and takes into consideration the local materials and surrounding environment: limestone is used in the exterior and interior spaces of the building. Despite the large courtyard the space has remained little used, following the moving of the museum and primarily serves as a venue for local companies summer parties who lease it from KUMU. The main entrance in the courtyard serves as a main entrance only for school groups approaching the museum through the Lasnamäe tunnel, the majority of visitors incl tourists prefer use the side entrance from the Kadriorg park. Likewise, the main parking lot adjacent to the tunnel has proved to be used less than the small corner in the park accommodated for car parking.

Even though the architects of LUMU and MSU, are both from local origin, the respect given for the heritage traditions of Hungary and Croatia remains in existent even for the gaze of an outsider. Little reference in design of two venues is paid also to the genius loci of the district. Both architects' aim seems to be either constructing a liberally distinct differentiation from the surroundings, or instead promoting the creation of a new canon in the context of the city structure. Palace of Art design reveals little of its purpose, the building may just as well house office spaces, and its freestanding character nevertheless reveals the embodiment of a power structure. Is it a ministry, or municipality that we are dealing with? On the other hand, the building plays with the past in a peculiar way – the massive facade colonnade and wide stairways recall the public buildings in the Soviet era, particularly those erected in the 1950s and 60s.

The KUMU exhibition spaces distributed on five floors stand out for the wideness of halls, created by their spatial form overlooking each other. Although, the open structure of museum spaces may add width to the measurements, it complicates the exhibiting of contemporary art projects, particularly for their sound and video projections. Next to the exhibiting spaces, there are also other deficiencies to the distribution of spaces in the museum, which are caused by the fact that most of the work on planning was completed in the 1990s, when the growth of museum collections and size of the staff could not be predicted in detail, but which nevertheless does not justify the disfunctionality of the distribution of space that is often criticized by the audiences who find the arch form confusing for orientating oneself in the museum and the museum staff who suffer from the closed space of organization side and lack spaces for gatherings and occasional meetings.³¹

In the design of LUMU museum, very little usage of natural light and poor facilities for storing art works can be seen as a disadvantage as compared to the relatively large exhibition spaces (3300m²).³² For the building design and interiors, LUMU is also the most complex of the three case studies, especially due to the particular story related to the moving of

29 Ajakirja „Maja“ küsitlus Eesti Kunstimuseumi konkursi tulemuste kohta (1994). *Maja. Estonian Architectural Review*, No 2, 1994; Soomre, Maria-Kristiina (2002). *Modern Museum and the National Gallery Tradition. Possibilities of Self-Identification of the Art Museum of Estonia*. Estonian Academy of Arts, Institute of Art History, Tallinn. BA Research.

30 Interview with Marika Valk, Art Museum of Estonia Director, Tallinn, 9.04.2008.

31 Interview with Piret Kullerkupp, Head of Collections, KUMU Museum 10.12.2007.

32 Interview with Anna Balvanyos, Head of the Program Department, LUMU Museum, 3.01.2008.

collections and housing the existing institution into the new building. The museum spaces present several other spatial limitations, for instance, there is no project-space within the museum, which has complicated the involvement of younger artists for accomplishing temporary projects and created a sense of elitist reputation for the museum among the local artistic community.³³ Also the storing possibilities for art are reported to remain too scarce, and already now the museum is set into a position where it has started to look for other spaces for this purpose in the surrounding area.³⁴

MSU building is a free-standing monument by the big cross-roads, surrounded by several other single monuments built as pavilions for the Zagreb Fair in the 1970s. The shiny transparent surface and large concrete spaces surrounding the cubic form of the museum look for attention. Although, for MSU the actual use of the museum building can be further analyzed only after the museum has been opened for public some of the initial conclusions can be drawn taking the examples of KUMU and LUMU into account. The architect Igor Franic has insisted the importance of ensuring accessibility of the building to the public in the design of the surrounding – vast park of concrete, which as it is hoped by the museum director, will find active use by the visitors.³⁵ Accessibility and functionality have won against more aesthetic values that sometimes risk to compromise the usability of the building. However, it is impossible to offer any further insights since the museum exhibition spaces have not been opened for the public yet. The large halls bringing the purposes of audience recreation and museums' economic activities together, which is a common characteristic for all three museums, are especially spacious in MSU new building and through the large glass facades extend further to the concrete fields surrounding the museum construction.

Signs of Globalisation: The Museums Names

The names of new museums reflect best their recent identity shift, which much often than earlier are short and easy-to-remember catch words. One of the biggest changes for the CEE museums capturing their recent identity shift, have been the changes of names. Historically, the changes in museums names began to occur in the beginning of last century, we recall here MoMA Museum, that excluded the reference to being a “national” i.e. American museum in the early 1930s, and decided instead of Museum of Modern Art to use the name “MoMA” as its official name in reaching for audiences.³⁶ Another example from recent past is the name Kiasma proposed for the contemporary art museum in Helsinki, Finland, by the architect Steven Holl through the name of design entry (1993). In the 1990s Kiasma museum next to Moderna museum of contemporary art in Stockholm, has become one of the models of museum architecture in Northern Europe, as well as internationally. Holl's idea of „chiasma“ signifying „a crossing point“, or „a point of intersection“ for the museum building at the absolute heart of the city was later taken over by the museum institution and started to be used as the official name of the new museum.

Nowadays, a truly contemporary museum institution seems to be the more contemporary, the shorter is its name. LUMU, KUMU and MSU are as if shaped along the same model set by MoMA. Is that a modernist burden? The stories behind the names, nevertheless, prove to be notably different. Moving to the new building has been the main motivation and reason to

33 Interview with Barnabas Bencsik, Director of Agency for Contemporary Art Exchange, ACAX, Budapest 25.02.2008.

34 Interview with Anna Balvanyos, Head of the Program Department, LUMU Museum, 3.01.2008.

35 Pintaric, Snjezana (2007) *On the way to the new building: the museum of contemporary art Zagreb*. Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary art.

36 We are grateful for Kylie Message and Monika Flacke for their comments on this part of our analysis, which has enabled to develop this argument.

introduce a new name for all three museums that we analyse. Certainly, the age of internet which has influenced the museum constructions from the start, has set its own requirements for introducing shorter names, on the other hand the catch words reveal easier ways of getting the audience to remember the museum. However the fact that name National is excluded seems to refer to the desire to be part of the international contemporary art scene, rather than deal with local issues. The name KUMU for new museum building in Tallinn represents the inclusion of the public voice: the museum received its name through a public call for proposals, which was held during the construction period, two years before opening of the new museum. The name shift was notably promoted through an advertising campaign at the opening of the museum in February 2006, through which the identity of the new building was reintroduced and popularized within the public.

On the other hand, Ludwig Museum has been struggling to introduce the new name for the museum, LUMU, which was proposed by the museum staff in 2005. The difficulties may also relate to the ongoing difficulties of the institution in reaching out the broader public and little investments in marketing activities throughout its first years of its activities after moving to the new building.³⁷ Although the name LUMU was started to be used by the Museum, instead of the longer version „Ludwig Museum of Contemporary Art”, it has remained largely unknown, even in January 2008 it is difficult to make realize the local people in Budapest, that asking for LUMU Museum, the Ludwig Museum is kept in mind...

The museum architecture may also involve the web, as one of the important extensions of the museum experience provided to the potential or already existing audiences. As a part of marketing campaign in 2007 MSU museum introduced a new logo with the slogan “MSUSEUM”, and launched a new website www.msu.hr in order to engage with audiences due to the lack for a permanent exhibition space in a new way. The website gives detailed information on the history and museum collections and introduces the various opportunities that will be provided after the opening of the new building.

From One Space to Another: The Museum Organization in Transition

Museums embody on one hand the rules, norms, and beliefs of the society reflected in their collections, and on the other hand the mindset of people and the existing organizational culture through their institutions. Institutional settings in the framework of architecture are, therefore, crucial for understanding museums ambitions and their actual functioning in the society. This relationship for museums in transitioning society represents a conflict.

The museums may lack staff for financial reasons, often the moving exhausts the museum budget and building a new permanent exhibition may cause a lot of additional resources from the institution. The need to review partnerships, outsourcing the activities and importantly also the means of permanent and temporary funding sets the museums in the state of constant stress, which cannot remain unnoticed in their relationship to their audiences. We make an attempt to conceptualize these relationships further through the societal and architectural arrangements of museums in context.

In all the three case studies, the evolution of thinking about museums roles and functions in relation to the audiences can be recognized. This becomes visible particularly through their locations: *the museums have moved downtown* from up the hill. They have literally come closer to their audiences, from their former Arcadian environments which are often also the concentration of different power structures, such as parliament buildings, cathedrals, and

37 Interview with Zsuzsanna Feher Head of Communications Department, LUMU Museum, Budapest, 30.07.2007.

other important institutions.³⁸ MSU as the newest of the buildings is an example where these considerations may be recognized the clearest, situating the museum in the urban fabric, aims to enliven the Novi Zagreb residential area, and facilitate the overcoming of modernist urban planning which characterises all the state socialist societies. According to this the various functions in the city structure were distinctly separated from one another, dividing the cities into clusters designed for specific functional purposes.

It should be also stressed that none of the buildings used previously to host the collections, were designed to be museums. Therefore, special attention to the purposes of housing museums (perhaps the least visible in LUMU) have notably shifted the identity of the three museums institutions in need for reinventing themselves following the postsoviet transition. Although, the LUMU Museum previously located in the Palace may not have been appropriate for storing and exhibiting contemporary art. Nevertheless, the previously the museum was located in a tourist epicentre, easily accessible for the local audiences as well as tourists. In fact the tourists formed the majority, about 60% among the museum's audiences.

In institutional theory, opinions vary about the actual role of institutions in the contemporary society, as the relationships between the state and individual, institutions and the citizen society have been revisited in post-socialist region, also contemporary architectural design can be seen to seek for ways to promote to the firmer collaboration between the two and bring transparency into the ways of communicating between the two. Nevertheless, the deconstructivist and/or monumental museum architecture seeking for attention and re-establishing new iconography for the cities, which until remains a widespread practice throughout CEE, does little to promote to neither of the two characteristics.

The three art museum buildings have a symbolical as well as practical importance of being the trendsetters within the three countries, this involve positive and negative impacts that need to be studied further in order to be better articulated. They have acted as test zones, for finding various solutions to overcome the postsocialist gaps in knowhow, funding and experiences related to networking and marketing. This involves particularly holding international architectural competitions for the museums building design, finding schemes for funding the construction works and best-suited institutional frameworks for these processes, and most importantly in finding ways for engaging the audiences further in the processes of construction and moving of the institution in order to better overcome the transition. For instance, the model set by KUMU museum to the new National Museum to be established in the second biggest city, Tartu, has already been visible in various ways. Possibly, the three construction works can provide the governments and other related parties in the relatively small postsoviet countries an opportunity to learn from the mistakes made in the processes on the way and whilst enable to avoid them in the further future.

Reaching Out for the Audiences after the Moving

The building of a new museum implies diverse consequences to the museums relationship to the audiences. In our three case studies, in Tallinn, Budapest and Zagreb, in particular due to the peripheral location of the new buildings, the museum organization has been set in a position where negotiations with the city governments are required in order to provide reorganized infrastructure to enable the access to the museum infrastructure. Although enabling better transportation facilities is planned in Budapest through construction of a new metro line, M4, and Tallinn is planning to establish a new tram line connecting the Town centre with the residential area Lasnamäe, the museums relationship with the communities requires more than physical access in the face of transportation.

38 Giebelhause, Michela (2006). Architecture is the Museum. In *New Museum Theory and Practice*. Ed. Janet Marstine. Blackwell Publishing, p. 47.

One of the crucial changes that has influenced the museums' programs and policies in the recent past, has been the idea of setting the audience at the heart of their functioning. This has urged the museums to find diverse ways of engaging, learning and offering the audiences a variety of means through which to participate in the museum activities, such as organising lectures, performances, online exhibitions, developing TV-programs dedicated to contemporary art, arranging painting and theatre workshops to mention just a few. This has also set the educators and art facilitators in a more important role, than previously creating new challenges as well as new costs. Also architecture shapes the museum experience for the audiences, and the ways they are reached; for the museum institution the architectural framework dictates its programming and curating activities. Next to these activities it is important to keep in mind that museum is also an economic body, which acts as a signifier for the development and welfare of a society. In order to meet these diverse expectations, museums are organized into different departments: offices for funding, programming, technical and maintenance facilities, negotiation for collaborations, etc. Janet Marstine has observed that the decision-making in museums give very little or no voice to education departments, and make little effort to better understand their audiences.³⁹ This is especially true for the three museums where the education departments are recently established.

The new building is a new space and place that needs to be accepted by the community, in order to fulfil its function, and require a meaningful role in the society. Research has shown that whilst people may not know what urban design elements are required to make a place like a museum special, they are very articulate about the places they feel good about⁴⁰. The aim of public architectural and urban design is to make people feel confident about the space and provide freedom for its convenient usages, in a museum this could mean visiting an exhibition or just going for a cup of coffee. In the cases of LUMU and MSU it is still too early to say whether the hopes set on the transitioning institutions can be justified, whereas the areas are still under important regeneration plans that do not make the place welcome yet. A social museum in case of KUMU, might mean reaching out to its audiences in the surrounding residential area and reinventing its relationship to Lasnamäe, despite for the fact that it is not encouraged by architectural design.

Following the moving to the new building there are several new activities that KUMU and LUMU museums have started to promote, seen from the architectural design and website for the opening, this promises to be the case also for MSU. This can be seen in new architectural particularities, lighting design, audio-tour headsets, museum cafeteria which are all framing devices, and participate tightly in the experience of facilitating the museum going for the audience. All the three museums, provide various ways for the audiences to spend a day in the venue, including facilities for dining, shopping, guided tours and leisure. Along these changes education has become notably more important, for KUMU and LUMU museums after their moving. In KUMU a new education centre was established in 2005, which provides tours for children, publishes materials and offers special creative courses for various age groups.⁴¹ As LUMU faces difficulties in promoting the museum among tourists who previously formed over 60% of their audience, the focus has been shifted to young audiences, which has lead to tightening of the cooperation between the museum and schools.⁴² Numerous new job positions related to education and guiding are created in LUMU and KUMU in order to better reach the needs of the young audiences and introduce them to the variety of museum programs.

39 Marstine, Janet (2006). Introduction. *New Museum Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 24-26.

40 Brecknock, Richard (2006) *More than just a bridge. Planning and designing culturally*. Stroud: Comedia

41 Interview with Sirje Helme, Director, KUMU Museum, 4.07.2007.

42 Interview with Zsuzsanna Feher, Head of Communication Department, LUMU Museum, 30.07.2007.

The MSU museum's activities, before the moving comprise a great deal of networking. While waiting for the opening of the new venue, since 2005 the museum has no permanent exhibition space, the museum staff and part of the collection is in the building located in the Old City Centre. The activities and exhibitions take place in other venues and various spaces throughout Zagreb (cultural centres, exhibition halls, other museums), which are to be found by the museum staff.⁴³ Although, this may enable good way for a museum to engage with various audience groups, nevertheless, this also notably obstructs the possibilities to deal with museum education and address the special needs of the different audience groups.

Conclusions

The museum institution embodies various aspects and characteristics of the society. Architectural and urban framework of new museum institutions is particularly important as it shapes the functioning of the new museum institutions in the societies, and is tightly linked to the (re-)establishing of the relationship between the museum and its audiences. In the form of public architecture all three museum buildings one hand visualise the power of the individual in designing architectural framework of the memory of a community and constructing important milestones in the landscape. On the other hand, they are products of complex social and economical processes, involving privatization, entering of foreign capital and corporative investments.

This study on the impacts of museum architecture has been carried out through analyzing three museums functioning in the present framework in order to indicate some of the crucial changes that have influenced the interventions of the cultural sector into urban landscape through buildings of art infrastructure in Estonia, Hungary and Croatia. We may well see Art Museum of Estonia, Kumu building (2006) as a monument to the Estonian-Finnish economical and political relations, and Croatian Museum of Contemporary Art, MSU (2008/2009?) tightly linked to the ending of Yugoslavian War and Palace of Art (2005) as an outcome of the rapid economical developments Central Europe and growing of public private partnerships in the art field.

Just as the rapid transformations in CEE markets encouraged the entering of international corporations, the design competitions for public buildings which have been made more and more international have urged the entering of internationally renowned architects to design the symbolical buildings and sometimes entire hearts of the urban landscapes in CEE. This has lead to the development of real estate companies and architectural offices in major cities, who next to many other activities started to organize international design competitions for public buildings.

The impacts of large scale privatisations, decentralization of cultural life and changes in the urban settings have had notable influences on the construction of new cultural institutions throughout CEE. We have discussed further the complex process of establishing a three new contemporary art museums in Central Eastern Europe focusing on issues related the architectural design of the building and its peculiarities, the changes in the organization system of the museum, the impacts of the building in the city space and its symbolic meaning. There are strengths and weaknesses to be indicated in all the three museums cases, KUMU, LUMU and MSU, many of them raise from the context, others have been created by the stakeholders.

The long process of establishment of the three museums also seem to refer to some of the particular weakness in the transitioning societies developments, which are characteristic to all the three countries. Despite the need for new infrastructure for public buildings the prolonged

43 Interview with Marija Gattin, Head of the MSU Archive, 18.05.2007.

processes of constructing new museums refer to the absence of strong culture of collaboration on the level of Cities and Governments where they are built, as compared to the democratic countries with stronger roots. The projects also lack of further involvement of the weak local citizen society, in the three countries, which has enabled to grow further only since the beginning of 1990s. The common nominator for all of the three organisations, ultimately, also is their status of being in a willingly or unwillingly designed form symbolical monuments for the new social order, which sets a framework on the ongoing processes of nation state building.

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