

HISTORICAL HERITAGE AND CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE FUSION AT THE EXAMPLE OF THE CITY CENTER OF GRAZ

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Abstract. *The research subject of the paper is the center of Graz as a fusion of historical heritage and modern architecture, with its seven landmarks of modern architecture selected here in order to make a short review of this unusual mix. Although the historical center is well known as UNESCO protected district, that may not be damaged or destroyed, the avant-garde shops and bars found their place in the ancient center, complementing it. A contrast of new and the old is also present in the likeness of a fusion of historical heritage and contemporary architecture. This unusual combination made Graz a unique city which could serve as example for the future, how to make contemporary architecture in the middle of historical environment.*

Key words: *history of architecture, modern architecture Graz.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The city of Graz is considered to be one of the most beautiful cities in Europe, with its old historical center. Although it is a small city with a quarter of million inhabitants, the second largest town in conservative? Austria, the city surprises with the number of modern buildings. The most surprising fact is that some of top modern contemporary buildings and installations found their place in historical center, thus making Graz an important city on a tourist map. Graz is attractive not only because of its historical center, which became a UNESCO world cultural heritage site, but also because of its modern architecture. The two most remarkable projects, Murinsel and Kunsthaus were designed for the occasion of "Graz-Cultural Capital of Europe" manifestation. The year 2003 has been considered to be one of the most significant years in its history in which Graz was named by the EU Ministries of Culture to be the center of cultural events in Europe for the whole year.

2. GRAZ AS A VALUABLE HISTORICAL TOWN

Prior to laying out the short history of the city, it is important to emphasize that an interplay of cultures significantly influencing architecture as well as other aspects of life, could be noticed. Cultures such as Romanic, Slavic, Magyar (Hungarian) and Alpine-Germanic gave a unique character to the city. The history of the city started 5000 years ago. For the first time in 1128 the name of Graz was mentioned in documents. In 1379 Graz became the capital of "Inner Austria", the area which consisted of Styria and Carinthia, together with Krain, inner Istria and Trieste (today the territory of Slovenia, Italy and Croatia), and residence of Hapsburg dynasty to 1619.

Styles which could be noticed at buildings are from Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and Historicism up to Art Nouveau.

Ever since Graz was a important crossroads owing to its border position. With just 45 miles to the east to the border with Hungary Graz became an important east-west link and with just 25 miles to the south to the Slovenian border it was the so-called Balkan gate. Known as an important cultural, scientific and technological center, Graz offers great educational possibilities with its four universities. Mentioning industry cannot be omitted as Graz is the third biggest economic center in Austria with about 50% of population in Graz working in local industries.



Fig. 1 The historical center of Graz
Photographs made by the author

3. MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN GRAZ WITH SOME EXAMPLES

Observing the historical center, reveals the beautiful lines of domes and facades, predominantly of Baroque and later periods. The Modern Movement, that appeared on the international stage round 1928, hardly left some traces in Graz. Even, the period before

the Third Reich and the time during the National Socialism period, did not leave any important influence on architectural development of modern Graz.

The period after 1960s stands out as a new period of modern Graz architecture as since then Graz started to flourish in terms of contemporary architecture. At the beginning, the new buildings have been built in the outer areas among the old fabric.

"The new Graz Architecture has its theoretical roots in the 1960s, but the political conditions that allowed the commissioning of most of the work shown in this issue were not in place until around 1980." Peter Blundell Jones, New Graz Architecture-Austria, Architectural Review, Oct, 1995

The spirit of rebellion was well known among artists in Graz. The Forum Stadtpark, as place for rising the new art movement, was a green area between old city center and its eastern suburbs. The group of artist, gathered around one central idea of making new art in Graz, saw this place as perfect place for a new art gallery where new ideas could be developed and new, progressive discussions had. The entire idea and the movement was too much for the conservative surrounding, provoking a strong reaction of the government and leading to final demolition of the café-gallery building. The reaction of an intellectual public was so strong that the city government was forced to rebuild the building. The café-gallery Forum Stadtpark has since had its place in the history of the modern art-architectural movement in Graz.

"Initially, confronting a deeply conservative public, the forum`s activities were considered highly controversial. But gradually reaction lessened and the frontier of acceptability was pushed outward. The organization was greatly helped by a progressive politician, the Styrian Kulturreferent Hanns Koren, who opened the way for an annual festival Steierische Herbst (Styrian Autumn), which started in 1968 and soon become the largest avant-garde event of its kind in the German-speaking world." Peter Blundell Jones, New Graz Architecture-Austria, Architectural Review, Oct, 1995

Even though it is a small city, Graz certainly has its place on the map of modern architecture guide, not only within Austria but also in Europe. A large number of new buildings has been constructed in the last few decades, such as the Stadthalle (civic hall), the Children`s Museum, the Helmut-List-Hall, the Kunsthause (Museum of Contemporary Art) and the Island in the Mur, The Styrian hospital building sector, Lift in Berg and Dom in Berg, reconstruction of Tummelplatz, Universities complexes and many more.

The group of architects represented the essential core of modern contemporary architecture, such as Klaus Kada, Volker Giencke, Szyszkowitz- Kowalski, Günter Domenig, Eilfred Huth, Konrad Frey, Bernard Hafner, Heidulf Gerngross, Manfred Kovatsch, Helmut Richter and more.

As a neutral observer from the outside, one enters the center of Graz, with intention to visit one of the most valuable and best preserved historical city centers in Europe. Surrounded by beautiful UNESCO protected buildings, a visitor experiences the history of Hapsburg dynasty surrounded by Baroque buildings as well as by the medieval vaults and arches. Coexisting with the history in the same place, there are avant-garde shops and café-bars together with examples of contemporary architectural achievements making a marvelous fusion of new-old architectural language. The situations and surroundings (environments?) where the old meets the new are not invented in Graz as there are more examples of such architecture round Europe. Graz is considered as a valuable example of fusion of historical heritage and contemporary architecture, as is one of the rare cities

where the whole city center is UNESCO protected, but than, the magnificent contemporary buildings have been built all around, even in the river Mur in cases where no other location could be provided. The power of this small Austrian city, the will and desire for inventions and progress are worth of admiration. Graz is an example that shows to all that there exist no limits, and nothing and nobody can stop creative energy to grow up. If there is not enough space among buildings, there is a river. If the river is full, there is the sky.

3.1. Kaufhaus Kastner+Öhler- Shopping center

Founded by Carl Kastner and Hermann Öhler in Opava (today Check Republic), the Graz edificial has been built in 1883 and rebuilt in period from 1912 to 1914 into one of the most modern shopping centers in Europe of the time.

The first radical restoration of the building took place in 60s, when the basic building got new appearance, a very aggressive one for the time. At the end of 80s new reconstructions happened, the last changes being made in 90s. A large number of architectonic details, such as glass eaves in Sackstrasse, gave a modern look to the one of the oldest shopping centers in Europe. This unusual shopping center contains various architectural styles such as late Renaissance, Jugendstile and Modern.

Architect Michael Szyszkowitz and Karla Kowalski made a project of new additional part to the basic building in 2003. Wall to wall, the new next to the old, this new part of famous shopping center is facing the bank of the river Mur, just opposite to the Kunsthouse at the other side of the river. Together with Kunsthouse, they are standing at the Mur banks as the beginning of a fresh start of Graz. Never forgetting the past, bravely going toward the future, not disturbing but assisting in moving on.



Fig. 2 Example of new-old fusion at facade in the historical center of Graz

Photo made by author



Fig. 3 Reconstructed shopping center Kastner+Öhler in Sackstrasse

Photo made by author



Fig. 4 New additional building of shopping center Kastner+Öhler at the banks of the river Mur, just opposite to the Kunsthaus
Photo made by author

3.2. Kunsthaus as a fusion of architecture and media technology

This remarkable example of Art Museum in Graz, designed by Peter Cook and Colin Fournier, has been built in 2003 to contribute to the celebration of Graz as a European Capital of Culture 2003. This contemporary art space is anything else but a usual way to expose art with its blob¹ architecture shape in the middle of historical center. This building is even more unusual if one looks at the surrounding and notices that the gigantic bubble is just next to a baroque roof with red clay. The contrast could not be bigger.

This art museum has an aim to gather all contemporary art disciplines under its building, never permanent but intended to be always free for next step into the future, as no exhibition collection remains permanently. This fluidity of contemporary art is connected to fluidity of the river Mur. Has this been done on purpose or not, making art as fluid as the river running just by, and building such a structure here, that is not important anymore as Kunsthaus found its place here. It seems sometimes that the city of Graz has been always waiting for the gigantic blue bubble, through its long rich history, to fulfill something that was missing at this place.

The façade of the museum, the so called BIX façade is a mix of architecture and New Media. The name BIX is consisted of the words "Big" and pixels" and is type of acryl skin on gigantic urban screen. The fluorescent (luminescent?) 930 40 Watt rings are to be found in the surface of the 900m² of outer skin of the building.

"The Berlin based designer group realities: united creates a unique fusion between architecture and media technology with the light and media façade BIX. It is a 900m² large media installation made of light rings for façade of the Kunsthaus Graz. BIX means to tune the Eastern façade of the biomorphic Kunsthaus architecture with the help of 930 standard circular 40W fluorescent lights. Each lamp serves as a pixel, which can be controlled individually by a central computer. That way simple signs, images and films in

¹ "Behind this skin realities: united has installed a field of neon lamps. The covered area is approximately 20m high and 45m broad. Each lamp is individually and infinitely adjustable. Luminosity can be varied between 0% and 100%. With the help of digital control system schematic animations, graphics and alphabets can be displayed." Kunsthaus Graz, BIX Façade, Kunsthaus Graz am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz

*low resolution can be generated over the whole Eastern front. The main concern is not technology but the interaction between media, architecture and the activity of the Kunsthaus."*²

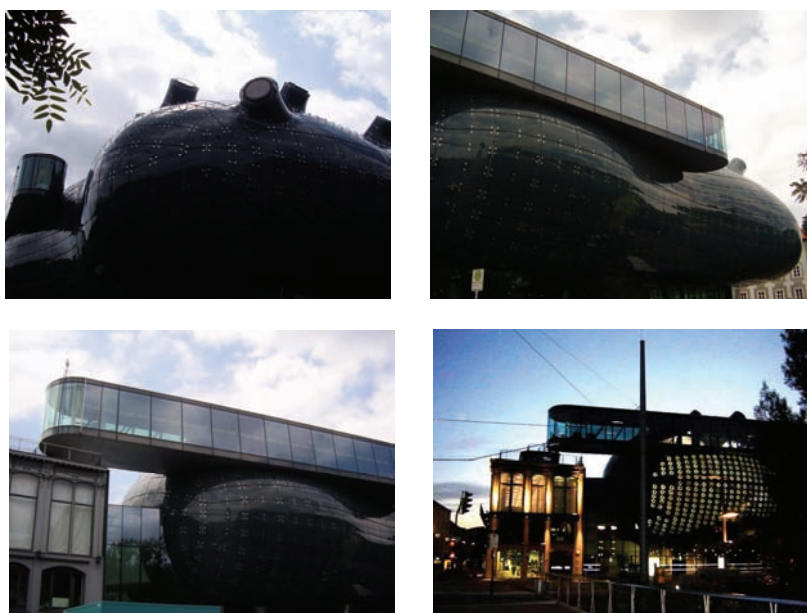


Fig. 5 Kunsthaus
Photo made by author

3.3. Murinsel – a ship in the shape of a shell or just an island?

Is it a shell, a ship, an installation, an island or just some modern installation in the river? It was constructed in 2003 for the occasion of celebrating Graz as the Culture Center of Europe. The best way to describe it might be: an artificial island with coffee-house and the performance stage for contemporary events. In 2003, New York artist and designer Vito Acconci was invited to make some kind of art attraction in the river, all by idea of Robert Punkenhofer from Graz, the founder of ART&IDEA. This artificial floating platform located in the middle of the river became one of the landmarks of the city. Unusual giant shell measures 50m in length and 20m in width. The shell is connected with the both Mur banks with the footbridges, one for the each bank. This giant installation is formed from an open and a closed part, amphitheatre with playground surrounded with

² Blob architecture or Blobitecture is a movement in modern architecture invented in 1995 by architect Greg Lynn in his experiment with digital design with aim to create new and unusual forms. The interpretation of blob buildings is loose, including not only an architecture coming from computer realm but all also curved and odd-looking buildings. The best known blob buildings are Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (1997) and Experience Music Project (2000). Kunsthaus Graz is considered as well known blob architecture example. Kunsthaus Graz, BIX Façade, Kunsthaus Graz am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz

sitting places that offer relaxation time to everyone, and a modern café. The Murinsel is planned and built to accept maximum 350 visitors.

Murinsel is a great example of how one architectural object can make an attraction from the murky and dark river that has nothing attractive by itself. With this structure the Mur is alive and participates equally in contemporary art of the city.



Fig. 6 Murinsel
Photo made by author

3.4. Mursteg-pedestrian Bridge across the river Mur

Mursteg was made by well known Austrian architects Günter Domenig³³⁾ and Hermann Eisenköch in 1992. Narrow, sharp, innovative and provocative, this small piece of art not just connect two shores of river Mur but also gives a contribution to the fusion of new and old. Old is the river and new is the deconstruction in the body of the bridge.



Fig. 7 Mursteg- pedestrian Bridge
Photo made by author

³ Günter Domenig is one of the founders of "Grazer Schule". He is known as the author of remarkable projects in Austria such as Mursteg Graz, Center at Kai Graz 1993, ReSoWi Center of University of Graz 1993/96, City Theater 1998, Hotel Augarten Graz 2002, T-Center Vienna 2004. In his work various styles alternate, such as Brutalism, Structuralism, Postmodern and Deconstruction. Steinhaus in Steindorf is his most important building rated among Deconstruction.

3.5. Center at Kai

This building was built in 1994 by Günter Domenig. The new building found its place, right at the edge of historical center, at the very place where the old tower was situated. By its position at the entrance of the central area, it looks like a modern tower that tells us one simple thing- "centuries have changed but my purpose is still the same". The time is passing, the shape is the same and the only thing that changed is the dress that the old tower is wearing today. The old building was a tower with a steeple while the contemporary building is a modern center with many purposes such as café bars, restaurants and offices. This is great example of how one modern building with sharp edges stands (fits in)? traditional surrounding.



Fig. 8 Center at Kai
Photo made by author

Fig. 9 Neighbor building
Photo made by author

3.6. Intendance and a coulisse dump of the Opera House

The Opera House in Graz has been built in 19 century, in Neobaroque stile. Architect Gunter Wawrik made a project for additional parts to the old building in 1984. The Opera building has been extended for a coulisse dump, rehearsal rooms, dressing-rooms and intendance? offices. Light bridge construction filled with glass represents a connection between different parts of the building.



Fig. 10 Intendance and coulisse dump of the Opera building
Photo made by author

3.7. Light Sword statue

This modern statue, made by Graz artist Hartmut Skerbisch in 1993 is one of the well known modern landmarks and attractions in Graz. Although it is not a building but an installation, it would undoubtedly be treated here as one of the example of new old fusion in Graz center as it stands just next to the Opera building. This installation was made for the 1 Steirischer Herbstfestiva in 1992. As in year 1992 there was the celebration of 500 years of America discovery, artists in Graz were also inspired by this and gave their contribution to the theme. Artist Hartmut Skerbisch, inspired by the Statue of Liberty in New York, made his version in Graz, with the same height as the real model in New York, 54m high. The name of statue is Light Sword, inspired by a text by Franz Kafka. Statue in Graz has sword and globe and is certainly magnificent.



Fig. 11 Space installation
in front of the Opera
Photo made by author

4. CONCLUSION

A few examples of the historical heritage and contemporary architecture fusion in the center of Graz were given. In conclusion we could add that Graz is definitely the best example how modern can meet past without disturbing environment and demolishing the valuable historical monuments. It is important to know the past in order to understand the present and the most important, in order to face the future without fear of unknown. Buildings certainly have emotions and each of them tells us some story. Just by trying to understand each of them, by looking with consideration and sensibility what more could we do to help this building to continue to live forever, just than we are allowed to understand some parts of the past and to adjust to modern and progressive ideas.

Graz is a great example of how one historical town is capable to continue its development in a modern way.

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FUZIJA ISTORIJSKOG NASLEDJA I MODERNE ARHITEKTURE. PRIMER CENTRA GRACA

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U radu je dat prikaz centra Graca kao fuzija istorijskog nasledja i moderne arhitekture. Odabrano je sedam primera karakterističnih obeležja moderne arhitekture u Gracu kako bi se prikazao neobičan mix starog sa novim. Iako je istorijski center od velikog značaja i pod zaštitom UNESCO kao značajna Evropska kulturna baština, u čijem području nije dozvoljeno rušiti i ponovo graditi, avant-gard prodavnice i moderni barovi su našli svoje mesto u istorijskom centru, udopunjujući ga. Takođe je prisutna i fuzija istorijskog nasleđa i savremene arhitekture, kontrasti novog i starog. Ova neobična kombinacija čini Grac jedinstvenim gradom koji može poslužiti kao primer u budućnosti kako ne uništiti nasleđe prilikom izvođenja savremenih arhitektonskih dela.