Alexander Schleicher

CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN CHANGED SOCIAL CONDITIONS

The topic includes wide range of problems concerning development and the present condition of cultural institutions in changed social and political conditions after the year 1989 in our country. New political conditions meant changes in the economy. The transformation of planned economy into market economy has been reflected in changed social conditions. This change caused the change of financing conditions in all spheres of social life, not excluding culture. Another important aspect of changes is the division of Czechoslovakia into Bohemia and Slovakia. The reflection of the political changes in culture is illustrated on examples, that will represent the situation.

The first example is a big theatrical building from the past political era (before 1989) - the new building of the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava.

The architectural design of the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava was chosen in a competition. The winners of the competition were architects Peter Bauer, Martin Kusý and Pavol Paňák.

The new building of the Slovak National Theatre is situated in the area of Pribinova street. Now, the surrounding sites are still occupied by inadequate small urban structures. It is expected, that the whole area will be completely changed until the new theatre building will be finished. The site will become the part of the future promenade and a very prestigious city area.

The architectural concept of the building is respecting larger urban links in composition of the designed materials, operational parts, inside spaces and their mutual relations. The design of the building is respecting the affinity to two dominant attributes of Bratislava, namely the river Danube and the Bratislava castle.

The new building is formed as a connection of two cubic volumes of the opera house and the drama house in such way, that in the intersection they create an architectural culmination of the square of an entire area. The front parts of semicircular and rectangular shapes are a proper framework for various social activities. The exterior of the Slovak National Theatre, especially the square in front of the theatre, is in friendly scale, but viewed from the distance it has, together with chamfered fronts, a monumental appearance. The concept is determined, in principle, by the correspondence between architectural and artistic formation.

The building will serve as the drama theatre, the opera and the ballet theatre - it has both the drama and the opera stages (even if the link of these two different functions into one building is sharply discussed). This fact is reflected in functional and spatial relations. That means that there are two stages in the building (one for opera and ballet and the other for drama). There is an experimental hall. It can function independently from drama, opera and ballet stages. The disposition arrangement is based on dividing building into two units.

The main opera hall has a capacity of 928 seats in the parterre, boxes and galleries. It consists of the auditorium, the main stage, two side stages and the back stage, the proscenium and the orchestra pit. The shape and the dimensions of the opera hall are determined by special requirements of the opera: like visibility, natural acoustic of the space, fire precautions and technical parameters of the machinery and electrical equipment.

Special equipment of the opera hall is as follows:
- *two special elevators connecting two side stages with decoration storerooms, enabling continual and unlimited changes during the performance*
- *side trucks (these are the special floor technologies) moving from side stages to the main one, where they are inserted on the floor level*
- *fire and acoustic curtains, they detach the side stages, enabling changes during the performance*
- *revolving stage; it can be put in from the back stage*
- *back bridge which also serves as an elevator from the decoration storeroom*
- *it is possible to create two levels of the stage and a raked stage on the main stage*

The drama hall has a capacity of 665 seats. The hall is shaped as an amphitheater with two raised boxes. The hall is characterized by a proscenium with an amphitheater stage. The theatrical space consists of the auditorium, the main stage, and the two side stages. The two side stages are linked with the decoration storeroom by an elevator enabling unlimited changes during the performance. The floor technolo-

gy is based on the principle of a cylindrical revolving stage (that enables revolving movement of the stage). It is possible to create two levels of floors on the main stage and, a raked stage as well.

The experimental studio has a capacity of about 150 seats, depending on individual performances. It consists of a "black box" with flat floor, equipped with technology of a moving proscenium and with possibility of lighting along the perimeter and from the ceiling. The auditorium with chairs can be shifted in and out. All arrangements of this theatrical space are depending on the director's ideas.

In the new building of the Slovak National Theatre, there are designed special spaces for rehearsals to reduce financial and energetic costs. Big spaces of main halls for drama, opera and ballet are not used for rehearsals . There are some special additional smaller spaces which serve for rehearsals. For instance for opera and ballet is designed an opera rehearsal stage with an orchestra pit of about the same size as main stage, two ballet rehearsal rooms, arranging room, orchestra and choir rehearsal room, few repétiteur rooms. For drama, there is a multipurpose rehearsal room and a rehearsal stage serving also as an experimental studio with seats and access for auditorium.

On the two bottom floors are general storerooms, garages for 126 cars, and technological equipment. The noisiest technological equipment, as machinery for air conditioning, is situated outside the main building.

The second example is a different type of theatrical building. It is the architectural study of The Puppet Theatre in Banská Bystrica. This example of a small theatrical building has been reconstructed and new additions have been made. The building has been recently finished.

The architectural project was designed by a theatrical designer Ján Zavarský and architect Tibor Majláth. The main idea of the preliminary study was chosen in a competition. The authors, especially Ján Zavarský, have been experienced in designing small experimental studios. He is one of the designing authors of the theatre "Goose on a string" in Brno. Well known is his opinion: Projects of big theatres are suitable for capitals and big cities and they already have been built in Slovakia. These theatres were built in the past, they serve and they will serve in the future. Now, it is time for designing small projects and reconstructions. The puppet theatre in Banská Bystrica is representing this way in theatrical architectural design.

The site of the theatre is located between two almost parallel streets - Skuteckého and Horná. The main access to the theatre is now from the Skuteckého Street. The project is searching for a new access from Horná street. The new access crosses the site of Dominik Skutecký`s house, closer to the centre of the city.

The project is designed not to change the architectural character of the existing historical building. The idea is to enlarge the existing building, to enlarge the capacity of the theatre and to enlarge spaces for actors and employees. The project is divided into several phases.

The first phase is including the conversion of the main existing building to create the experimental studio "Dominika" in the loft of the old building. The experimental studio offers the possibility of variable arrangement of the auditorium. It has a capacity of 100 seats and covers the area of 10 times 11 metres. The floor in the hall is flat, offering possibility of creating raked seating arrangement with the help of wooden rostrum platforms.

The main part of the project, the second phase, is construction of the basic volume of the main theatrical hall with flexible space, a vestibule with the entrance and the staircase parts. This theatrical hall will have a capacity of 200 seats. The hall dimensions are: width 12 metres, length 17 metres, and height 6,2 metres. Dimensions are determined with respect to the capacity and economical aspects (the hall can be extended to the part of the vestibule). The hall is an irregular space with various possibilities of arrangement. The inner space is defined as a "black box", without any architectural elements, expecting that the atmosphere will be derived from the relationship between actors and spectators.

The third and the last phase includes building of a bistro, public garden and an open amphitheatre with seating capacity for 200 seats and a corridor from the garden to the terrace above the main hall. An open theatrical space, with the auditorium for 64 seats and 24 more seats in the open-air café is situated on the terrace.

When we compare the two examples of theatre buildings mentioned above we may say that they represent the construction and reconstruction of cultural buildings in general. One of them is the example of a present designed whereas the other was design in the past.

The topic of my dissertation could possibly include all types of cultural buildings, but it will not because of the enormous range of the problems. In such an extensive theme it would be necessary to specify the problem, and its core and select the most important aspects. My dissertation analyses will

cover the cultural institutions of top importance like: The Slovak National Theatre, The Slovak National Museum, The Slovak National Gallery, The Center of Scientific-Technical Information (the previous The Technical Library), The University Library and The National Museum of Science and Technology. The last of these institutions is not existing yet. Cultural institutions of top importance are and will remain in the center of interests of every country. National cultural institution will present state cultural activities within the given field.

I would primarily like to devote my attention to The National Museum of Science and Technology (because is not existing yet). My work should be divided into two units, that will reflect two levels of solving the problem. In the first part I will analyze the urban situation of the present location of cultural institutions in Bratislava and I will try to find an optimal urban solution of arranging these institutions. Location of the cultural institutions is one of the most important problems. Cultural institutions, especially top cultural institutions should be located in the center of the city (or at least the wider center of the city). This is what makes the center of the city determined. Some of these institutions have close relations for instance galleries and museums. Some of these institutions have also relations with other types of centrally located institutions, for instance libraries and universities. Some of the institutions don't have any mutual relations, even to the other types of buildings. But central position of these buildings evokes the idea of association. If the top cultural institutions are loca ted far from the center or if distance between them is bigger, then it is important to make them reachable by a suitable communication system. This experience is obtained through study of foreign examples and examples of European capitals, which are culturally close to Slovak conditions. These examples are always a fruitful inspiration in designing the location of our top cultural institutions. There is an idea to build up a system of top cultural institutions and locate them in Bratislava central city zone. This zone is joined by the motive of natural phenomenon such as the river Danube. Building up of the national and cultural institutions will improve the definition of the center of Bratislava. This is how the function of a capital should be better defined.

In the second part of my work, I will describe the architectural design of one of the above mentioned institutions. I want to refer to The National Museum of Science and Technology, which should be relatively a big complex or even a park consisting of smaller parts. The individual parts of the complex are planned as adaptable to different possible future functional use. This institution is not existing yet. Its building is still going to be designed and therefore it is possible to apply knowledge obtained from the foreign experiences with such institutions. The location of the complex and its functions, etc. will be analyzed. The solution must contain all the aspects, from urban point of view to the architectural detail.

The method of my work will be as follows: I will prepare all the necessary site conditions of The National Museum of Science and Technology for the architecture students. Several student groups will design the structure in their term student works. Finally, I will analyze the results of their work. These analyses will be the basis for searching of the most suitable design of The National Museum of Science and Technology.