

Pop-up architecture as a tool for popularizing theatre: Prototype No. 1

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Abstract: This article builds on previous research dealing with temporary theatres in the context of Europe and Slovakia, discusses the topic of pop-up pavilions in terms of architecture, their use in marketing and as a potential tool for reviving the theatre scene. Just as temporary architecture can activate neglected areas in the city and bring stimuli for a permanent change, we believe that it can be equally stimulating in the area of theatre. The Shed by Haworth Tompkins is one of the examples to demonstrate a possible positive contribution of such designs to a permanent theatre and its surroundings. Based on the analysis of similar examples and statistical data on the attendance of theatre performances, we decided to design and implement a prototype of a minimal theatre scene, which also provides wide variability and can be used beyond the time dedicated to theatre activities. In the design phase, we examine the limits of variability and explore the basics of kinetic architecture. In the second phase after the object is assembled and implemented, the subject of research will be its impact on the environment, the extent of user interaction with the object and the overall functionality of the object. The ambitions of our project do not reach as high as presented in *The Shed*. The aim was to test the possibilities and viability of a much smaller object, to document the cultural, educational, and even economic benefits, in domestic conditions of Slovakia. Thanks to *The Program for the Support of Young Researchers* of the Slovak University of Technology and *The PUN (Universal Design Support) Project No. 321041APA3* financed by the European Social Fund, the object is currently in production, and later will be moved to the faculty premises, surface-threathed and then assembled for the very first time. The prototype should be fully available by the end of the year 2022.

Keywords: architecture, theatre, pop-up, temporary, prototype

INTRODUCTION

Previous research has focused mainly on the issue of temporary pavilions intended for theatrical performances. The characteristic features of the completed projects in Europe and Slovakia were examined and compared. The common denominator was the already common word 'pop-up'. The Cambridge Dictionary explains pop-up as something unexpected, suddenly appearing, or happening (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). This phrase can also be found in the Merriam-Webster glossary, where it is explained on the example of a pop-up shop/store, and therefore a shop/store that is set up in a short time, with temporary operation, without connection to a specific place (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2021).

Marketing

This type of architecture has proven itself viable in numerous industries around the world. In the commercial sphere, it is used by many large companies to create a sense of limitedness, based on its temporary nature, to establish a closer contact with customers, to create an event that customers can share, an ex-

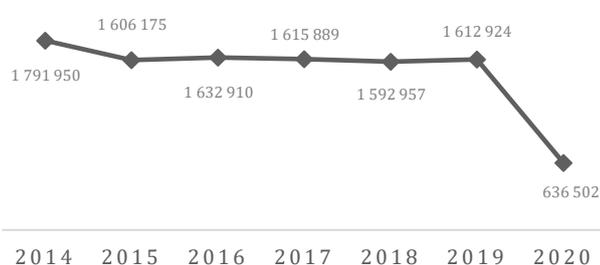
perience that supports verbal product recommendations. (Glover, 2021) According to Nielsen Global Research and Analysis Company, 92% of people believe recommendations made by their friends and family (Nielsen, 2012). Today, the equivalent of oral recommendations are social networks, for which temporary architecture with its distinct form is often rather attractive. The intention is to use proven methods from abroad, to attract customers, in our case audience, and to use the pop-up principle to popularize theatre in Slovakia.

Theatre

According to the cited Report on the State Statistical Survey in the Field of Culture, which is prepared annually by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, the attendance of professional theatres has been stagnating. Ongoing Covid-19 pandemic is not helping this situation either, restrictions have reduced the visit rate by more than half compared to the average for the last five years. (Národné osvetové centrum, 2020) Currently, it is not only theatre but also other fields of culture face the challenge of attracting a wider and more diverse audience. Research shows that the 'core' of theatre-goers are university-educated residents mainly in Bratislava and Nitra regions. Vladimír Blahó

speaks of theatre as of an undoubtedly more demanding kind of art, given its eminent artistic regularities on the one hand, and its lesser accessibility on the other hand. In conclusion of mentioned research on the relationship of the Slovak population to theatre, he adds that the result reflects a certain retreat of theatre as a significant social phenomenon in the then last decade and more broadly the direction of artistic culture towards a rather marginal position. (Národné osvetové centrum, 2003) There is a need to mention that although this research was conducted merely some 20 years ago, it still reflects diversity of the theatre audience as it is today. Therefore, we see research into temporary forms of theatre as an opportunity to verify their ability to function as theatre attractors, banners that can potentially attract audiences other than those who normally attend theatrical productions. Due to its volatile nature and mobility, temporary architecture can bring theatre beyond urbanized structures and thus bring culture closer to where it was previously unavailable.

Fig. 1. Visit rate of professional theatre in Slovakia. (Author: Kristína Boháčová, based on statistics from Report on the State Statistical Survey in the Field of Culture 2019)



THE SHED

The Shed by Haworth Tompkins studio can serve as an example of a positive installation that exceeded expectations and also went beyond its planned duration. A temporary theatre, with an original duration of 12 months, offered space for ambitious, experimental productions. Just as the building was an experiment itself, it offered space for experimentation as well as an opportunity to discover new ways of theatre-making and free creation. According to the studio, from the opening show in 2013 to the dismantling of the building in 2017, the Shed attracted a more diverse audience to the National Theatre of London and helped bring energy to the whole area. (HaworthTompkins, 2013) According to Patrick Healy of the New York Times, the London Theatre Complex attracted 1.5 million spectators during the 2012-2013 season, compared to 817,000 during the 2008-2009 season (Healy, 2013).

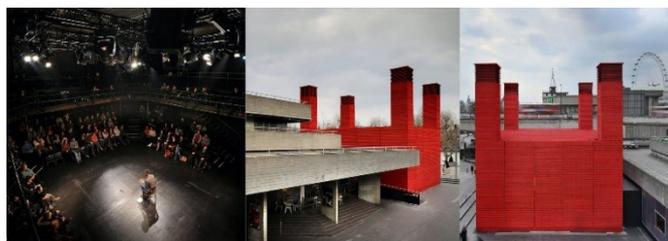


Fig. 2. The Shed by Haworth Tompkins. (Source: Haworth Tompkins, 2013)

PROTOTYPE NO. 1

The nature of the temporary architecture makes it an ideal subject for research by design and subsequent implementation phase. We had an opportunity to verify the gained knowledge in

practice and to design and build an object that will continue to be used for research. In the follow-up research, we plan to study the object in different types of environments in which it will be placed, monitor the interaction with users, i.e. time spent interacting with the object to find out people's interest in similar short-term projects. Furthermore, it is planned to focus our research on the clients, who in our case will be the organizers of events, of which our object will be a part. Initially, by designing, placing and later observing the life of an object, we plan to gather as much experience and relevant knowledge as possible for the purposes of writing the dissertation thesis. The input parameters in this case were not given for two reasons. Firstly, due to the nature of the pop-up pavilion, which is characterized by its lack of a stable location and so there is no place to which the object could be tied. Secondly, due to variability, which we have identified as one of the main constituting pillars of the concept, giving us the opportunity to apply a typological experiment. The model we built also derives on current needs for sustainability and universal design. One of the most important aspects was the simple assembly and dismantling of the object, resulting from the basic requirement for its temporary nature and variability during operation.

Variability

Although the idea to design a pavilion arose in response to the need for a deeper examination of a minimum theatre scene, in the process we evaluated that such object that can offer a wide range of functional requirements and, while also without location-bound limits, it can provide wider usability and thus meet the sustainability requirements better than a monofunctional object. At the same time, we wanted to design a universal small-scale architecture, without any specific purpose, as a starting point for architecture with a theatrical content. The selection of varied functions is not random, the functions with the same premise were chosen: and that is to fulfil the function, the viewer and the observer are needed. The 'programme' of the object will include performances such as theatre, cinema, discussions or exhibitions.



Fig. 3. Scheme of variability. (Author: Kristína Boháčová)

Kinetics

The circle as a universal geometric shape became the initial form for the floor plan of the object. It allows you to watch the event from all sides and thus maximize the number of viewers. At the same time, it does not limit itself to the environment and can function as a solitaire in an undefined space. The circle was later modified to a polygon, which was more suitable in terms of the nature of the object, which is not just variable, but also kinetic. It is kinetic in its simplest meaning, which we could have seen in the Middle Ages in the form of drawbridges, which are considered to be the first phenomena of kinetic architecture. (Kronenunberg, 2014) William Zuk and Roger Clark in their book *Kinetic Architecture*, argued that the goal of kinetic solutions is to adapt space to change (Zuk, Roger, 1970), which in our case would occur frequently, by changing the locations of the object due to various events.



Fig. 4. Scheme of variability. (Author: Kristína Boháčová)

Universal design

The final form of the stage and thus the overall form of the object was largely determined by the need for space accessible to all. This need is reflected in the dimensioning of individual segments to a width sufficient for access of wheelchair users. The places in the 'auditorium' are equal, set-in terrain, with a minimum barrier that is a five-millimetre difference between the terrain and the floor of the object. In the next phase, we are considering adding a blackout fabric top to the construction, so it can also serve as a space for simulating the perception of a space by visually impaired people.

Methodology

For the follow-up research, more than one research method were chosen. Both quantitative and qualitative research will be applied following the nature of research question posed. As an example, we can use a situation where the object is a part of an international construction fair. In this case, the research question could be whether there is a difference in the visit rates of a pavilion, based on the level of architecture attention given to the exhibition system itself. Observation will be the first step. We will be noticing the quantity of visitors of the object and the time spent in or around the object. Simultaneously we will also be observing other pavilions so the comparison can be made. Later we will focus on the clients and by interviewing them we will follow up the same question: i.e. whether they can perceive any difference compared to previous events, based on the pavilion form. The research question is changing along with the content of the object and the type of events, and so are the research methods. We assume that by analysing a full spectrum of situations in which the object can be used and by asking the right questions, we could gain a complex picture of the abilities and potential of the small-scale temporary architecture.

CONCLUSION

This article outlined the potential of pop-up architecture as a populariser of both theatre and architecture among the general public. On the example of the temporary theatre building The Shed from the United Kingdom, which served as an extension to the permanent theatre, we can see the project was a success on several levels. With its four times extended lifespan, it shows acceptance by both the theatre-goers and general public. It enjoyed positive feedback in several articles and recognition of architecture critics. At the time Evelyn Furquim Lima wrote her article *Architecture-event installation, or temporary theatre? A study of the Shed in London*, there was controversy over whether the temporary theatre would become permanent at the request of the London population and would change its name from The Shed to the Temporary Theatre. (Lima, 2017) Today we know that it did not happen; on the contrary, the building conformed to its temporary nature and then disappeared, remaining true to its mission. However, it does not change our view on the assumption that even temporary objects have a beneficial impact on their surroundings. Experiments have always pushed society forward, and it is temporary objects that, with their transient nature, have become the essence of experimentation. We saw an opportunity to test the limits of such object by exper-

imental design of a minimal variable architectural form, which deviates from the typologically traditional arrangement of a theatre. The ambitions of our project do not reach as high as presented in *The Shed*. The aim was to test the possibilities of a much smaller object, to document the cultural, educational, but also economic benefits, in domestic conditions of Slovakia. Thanks to The Program for the Support of Young Researchers of the Slovak University of Technology and The PUN (Universal Design Support) Project No. 321041APA3 financed by the European Social Fund, the object is currently in production, and later will be moved to the faculty premises, surface-treated and then assembled for the very first time. For possible future needs, we anticipate the designing of furniture such as seating, an information desk or bar counter. It is our first experience with this type of installation, especially in relation to the material, and therefore we need to include extra time in the project timeline. The prototype should be fully available later this year (2022).

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